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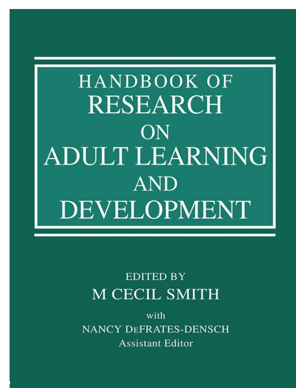

Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development

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Emerging Adulthood

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HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON ADULT LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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Chapter 2

Emerging Adulthood

Learning and Development During the First Stage of Adulthood

Jennifer L. Tanner, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, and Julie A. Leis

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Inherent in the call for the integration of educational psychology and adult learning (Smith & Reio, 2006) is the need for specific information that speaks to the unique developmental features of discrete adult age periods. Particularly important is the need to recognize the age period between 29 and 30 as a distinct developmental period, emerging adulthood, during which there is great demand for skill and knowledge acquisition as well as maturation as individuals make the transition to adulthood. It is likewise imperative to have appreciation for the diversity of learning experiences that occur during adulthood in general (Smith & Pourchot, 1998) and during emerging adulthood specifically. Given that the post-adolescent years correspond with those spent, by some, in post-secondary education, the college student development literature is often used to frame our understanding of learning, development, and adaptation during this age period. Development and learning during this age period, however, takes place across a variety of contexts, is not limited to those enrolled in college or university, and is distinctly different from development during childhood and adolescence as well as development that occurs in later stages of adulthood.

The distinct experiences of emerging adulthood translate into a need for a unique framework for promoting learning and development during these years. Subjectively, emerging adults experience their roles in the adult world as undetermined because they are in the process of making, but have not yet established themselves in their careers, nor in partnerships, nor families-of-creation. The complexities of adult life that co-exist in adult learners' lives (i.e., balancing one's sense-of-self, work responsibilities, and family demands for time and money) (Smith & Pourchot, 1998) are novel to the emerging adult. Prior to emerging adulthood, learning and development within the role of student is socially mandated, not assumed by choice. At emerging adulthood, learning and development become the responsibility of the individual and prioritization of continued education and maturation requires self-directedness. Given that emerging adults are in the process of determining their goals and directions in life, the connection between education and training is less apparent than for older adults whose learning and education is motivated by the need to obtain, attain, or maintain adult social roles (e.g., careers, families-of-creation).

The fundamental flux of emerging adulthood presents a challenge to programs designed to optimize development and transfer skills and knowledge to emerging adults. Nonetheless, education and development carry a heavy weight during these years. Because emerging adults have yet to enter into adult roles and responsibilities, this is a critical stage for the acquisition of resources. Understanding and incorporating developmental information to meet the unique needs to emerging adults will help optimize learning potential and build a foundation for life-span adult learning.

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The goals of this chapter are to provide (1) an overview of contemporary theory framing development between ages 18 and 29, and (2) a review of literature that provides information on the unique features of development during this age period. In the past decade, significant strides have been made to clarify the features of the contemporary transition to adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2004, 2006) reframed the third decade of life as a transitional stage of development, bridging adolescence and adulthood, labeling this age period emerging adulthood to distinguish the age period from adolescence and young adulthood. The subjective experiences of the age period are highlighted through Arnett's work, resulting in a characterization of this developmental stage as the age of instability, of feeling in-between, the self-focused age, the age of identity explorations, of possibilities. From a life-span developmental systems perspective, Tanner (2006) has conceptualized the developmental task of recentering, arguing that this is the key developmental task of emerging adulthood as well as a critical transition in life-span human development. Recentering involves realigning interpersonal relations as well as connections to contexts that facilitate development via dependency (e.g., families, schools) while, at the same time, engaging in temporary and then, finally, permanent commitments and connections to persons and contexts that facilitate development and self-sufficiency via interdependency. The second section of this chapter reviews empirical research highlighting the unique features of this age period, including surveys of literature detailing cognitive development, personality development, ethnic and cultural issues, mental health, physical health, family relationships and support systems, friendships, intimate relationships, media and leisure, education, and career development during the first stage of adulthood.

Theory of Emerging Adulthood: Ages 18–29

The theory of emerging adulthood was proposed by Arnett (2000, 2004, 2006) to identify a new and distinct period of the life course that came to define the experiences of 18- to 29-year-olds in industrialized societies over the past half-century. Prior to the 1950s, few people obtained higher education, and most young men became employed by the end of their teens, if not sooner. In 1950, only 25% of Americans obtained any higher education, and nearly all of them were young men (Arnett & Taber, 1994). Most young women, as well as many young men, remained in their parents' household until they married in their late teens or very early twenties. The median marriage age in the United States as recently as 1960 was just 20.3 for women and 22.8 for men (Arnett, 2000). The entry to parenthood came about a year later, on average. Thus, most young people went directly from adolescence to a settled young adulthood by their early twenties.

Over the past half century, the changes related to the age period from the late teens through the twenties have been dramatic. Participation in higher education has risen steeply, especially among young women. Now over 60% of young persons enter higher education the year after graduating from high school, and among undergraduates in the United States, 57% are women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The median age of first marriage has risen steeply as well, to its current record-high of 26.0 among women and 27.5 among men, with a corresponding rise in the median age of entering parenthood (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Furthermore, changes in attitudes toward premarital sex have taken place in American society, and the majority of young Americans have sexual intercourse for the first time in their late teens, a decade or more before they enter marriage. About two-thirds cohabit before marriage.

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Arnett argues that it no longer makes sense to group 18- to 29-year-olds with "young adults," because—unlike young adults—many emerging adults are not married, do not have children, and have not yet settled into stable full-time work. Nor does it make sense to call them "adolescents," because unlike adolescents they are not going through puberty, they are not in secondary school, and most of them no longer live in their parents' household. Calling them "emerging adults" recognizes that they are distinct in many ways from both adolescents and young adults, and that a new period of the life course has now developed in between these two periods.

So, what is distinctive about emerging adulthood as a period of the life course? Arnett has proposed five features that are prominent in emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Not all emerging adults experience these five features, but these are features that are more prominent during emerging adulthood than during other periods of the life course. According to the theory, emerging adulthood is 1) the age of identity explorations, 2) the age of instability, 3) the self-focused age, 4) the age of feeling in-between, and 5) the age of possibilities.

Identity explorations have been associated in the past with adolescence, because Erikson (1950) proposed in his life-span theory that each period of the life course has a central challenge or crisis, and that adolescents confront an identity crisis. In Erikson's view, adolescents focus on forming an identity, especially with respect to love and work. This may well have been true in the 1940s, when Erikson first formulated his theory. However, today most identity explorations take place in emerging adulthood, according to Arnett. With respect to love, many adolescents experience their first romantic relationships, but it is during emerging adulthood that romantic relationships become more identity focused, as emerging adults ask themselves, "Given what I know about myself, what kind of person would make a good life partner for me?" Similarly, many adolescents have part-time jobs, but it is in emerging adulthood that work becomes more identity-based, as emerging adults seek to find a job that fits well with their sense of what their abilities and interests are.

The identity explorations of emerging adulthood contribute to making it the age of instability because, in the course of their explorations, emerging adults often experience changes in love partners and in educational and occupational paths. They change residences more frequently than in any other part of the life course, for example moving out of their parents' household, living with friends, moving in to cohabit with a partner, moving out again, perhaps moving back home during a transition related to love, education, or work. Although emerging adulthood is largely experienced as positive, and numerous studies have found that median well-being and life satisfaction increase steadily during this age period (e.g., Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006), the instability of the period adds an element of stress and anxiety for many emerging adults.

Emerging adulthood is the self-focused age in the sense that it is the time of life that is the least structured and the least bound by obligations to others. Children and adolescents live with their parents and have to follow the program of daily life laid down by their parents and other adults: living with their parents, going to school, taking part in parent-approved leisure activities. In young adulthood and beyond, obligations to others also structure daily life for most people, in their roles as spouse/partner, parent, and worker. However, emerging adulthood is the time when structure and obligations reach their nadir, and individuals are free to make their own decisions without consulting others and to structure their daily lives as they wish. This does not mean that they are selfish—on the contrary, they tend to be considerably less egocentric than adolescents

are—but that they are temporarily relatively free from binding social roles and allowed to live as they wish to a large extent.

Emerging adulthood is the age of feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood. In numerous surveys, in the United States as well as in other industrialized countries, when asked if they have reached adulthood, most emerging adults respond neither yes nor no but "in some ways yes, in some ways no" (Arnett, 2001, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Facio & Micocci, 2003). Their subjective sense of making the transition to adulthood takes place gradually over the course of emerging adulthood. For most, the passage to adulthood is not marked by traditional transition events such as finishing education, marriage, and parenthood, but by more intangible and individualistic criteria, especially these three: accept responsibility for yourself, make independent decisions, and become financially independent. These criteria have been found to rank at the top in a wide range of studies in the United States and other countries, across regions, social classes, ethnic groups, and nationalities.

Finally, emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities in two respects. First, emerging adulthood is a time of high hopes and great expectations. Even if their current lives are stressful and difficult—which is often the case, since many of them are financially strained and are stressfully attempting to balance the demands of education, work, and social relationships—they nevertheless believe almost universally that adulthood will work out well for them in the end. They have high hopes of finding not merely a reliable marriage partner but a "soulmate," and not merely a stable and reasonably well-paying job but a job that is self-fulfilling, an expression of their identity. Second, emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities in the sense that it represents a window of opportunity for people to make dramatic changes in their lives. Children and adolescents are dependent on their parents and cannot leave even if their parents are incompetent or cruel. But emerging adults can leave, and some of them have the freedom to leave a pathogenic family life and make their own decisions which allow them to turn their lives around.

The American college experience and the college environment are well-suited to the developmental features of emerging adulthood. Taking a variety of courses in their first two years of higher education is a form of identity exploration for many emerging adults, as they see what areas resonate most strongly with their own abilities and interests. Explorations in love, too, are facilitated by having so many unattached persons in their age group in the same place. Pursuing a college education is in many ways a self-focused enterprise, because the focus is on building one's own knowledge and credentials, and much of one's time during these years is spent studying and attending classes. The college environment also promotes a sense of feeling in between adolescence and young adulthood, because college students often have more responsibilities than they did as adolescents but fewer than they will in adulthood, especially if they live in a group residential environment such as a dormitory.

Nevertheless, emerging adulthood is not experienced only by college students. Emerging adults who do not pursue higher education also seek satisfying identity-based work, although their explorations may be in different types of jobs rather than different college majors, and they also seek a "soulmate" in marriage. They also experience instability, through frequent job changes in their late teens and early twenties. They are self-focused, as most of them leave their parents' household but wait until at least their late twenties to enter marriage and parenthood. They are as likely as college-attending emerging adults to report the in-between status of feeling adult in some ways but not

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others (Arnett, 1997). And they have their own dreams, the belief that many doors are still open to them, even though without higher education credentials the attainment of those dreams may be elusive.

Individual Pathways from Adolescence to Young Adulthood

Arnett's theory describes the key population characteristics of the emerging adult age period, pointing to the critical developmental task of gaining self-sufficiency. Subjectively and psychologically, the experience of becoming an adult is a process rather than an event or string of social transitions. Complementing Arnett's characterization of emerging adulthood as a universal stage of development, Tanner (2006) articulated a three-stage process, recentering, that characterizes the individual, developmental process of transitioning from adolescence, through emerging adulthood, into young adulthood.

The developmental process of recentering is formulated utilizing life-span developmental (Baltes, 1997) and life-span developmental systems theories (Lerner, 2002), stressing the relational nature of human development, interactions between individuals and contexts that produce development. Individual pathways of development across emerging adulthood, as with all stages of human development, involve continuities and discontinuities, plasticity, normative and non-normative experiences, and variability in experiences (i.e., individual differences). As individuals move toward greater independence and adult self-sufficiency, as they recenter, development involves both gains and losses.

Recentering is a three-stage process by which individuals shift their primary involvements from the contexts of childhood and adolescence (which promote dependence) to contexts of adulthood (which nourish adult interdependence). Beginning when the individual is embedded in contexts of youth, primarily the family-of-origin (see Figure 2.1a), stage 1 is objectively marked by the legal emancipation of individuals from the responsibility of their parents. Despite a concentration of this occurrence at age 18, a small minority of individuals are emancipated legally as adolescents (e.g., financial emancipation from parents, early graduation from high school), some dissociate from institutional care before age 18 (e.g., runaway youth, those who leave high school before graduation), and a subgroup who reverse the dependent role before age 18 (e.g., those who become parents or take on head-of-household responsibilities). By definition, leaving adolescence and entering emerging adulthood is marked by a weakening of institutional ties. The extent to which resources remain available to the emerging adult (i.e., via families and/or institutions) and opportunities available to the individual represent two sources of individual differences predicting the extent to which an individual experiences emerging adulthood proper.

As adolescents age out of traditional contexts of dependence, they enter emerging adulthood proper, stage 2 (see Figure 2.1b), marked by temporary role commitments that serve the purpose of exploration of adult identities. During this stage, emerging adults progress in identity development by trying out different, albeit temporary commitments, and eliminating those that do not "fit" with their plans and goals. While adolescence is marked by subjective, internalized identity exploration, it is not until emerging adulthood that the active phase of identity exploration begins during which individuals attempt to match their adult senses-of-self with the socially-sanctioned adult roles.

Stage 3 (see Figure 2.1c) of the recentering process occurs when individuals make enduring commitments to relationships and careers, taking on adult roles and responsibilities. These, in turn, serve to sustain adult self-sufficiency. Identity is resolved at the

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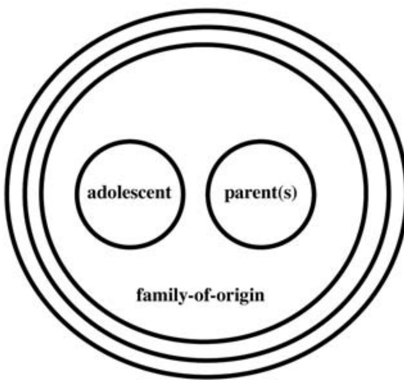

Figure 2.1a. Stage 1: Launching position: Adolescent transitions from dependent status into emerging adulthood

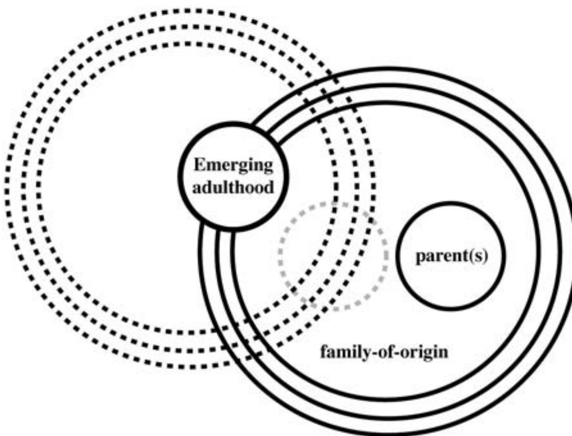

Figure 2.1b. Stage 2: Emerging Adulthood proper: The emerging adult is peripherally tied to identites & roles of childhood/adolescence; and, simultaneously, is committed to temporary identities & roles of adulthood

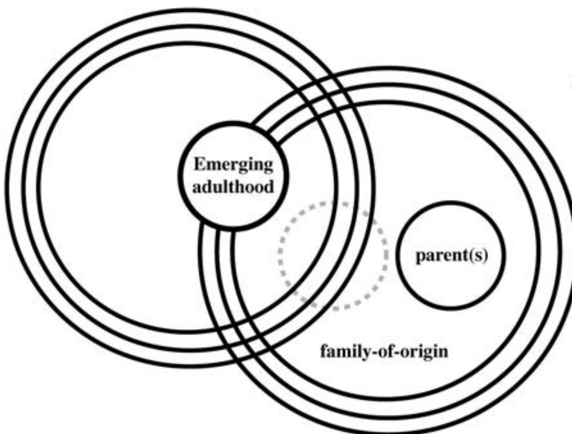

Figure 2.1c. Stage 3. Young Adulthood: The emerging adult exits stage 2 via permanent identity & role commitments

Figure 2.1 The recentering process.

entry into stage 3 marking the beginning of identity consolidation occurring around such commitments to careers, partners, children, community, and aging parents. Such commitments require stability of responsibility to these roles, to self and to others (Whiting, 1998). After the experimentation of emerging adulthood, and the culling of identity options and roles, the task at hand in young adulthood is the reorganization of self around the roles and responsibilities to which an individual has committed.

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The process of recentering is useful for understanding not only normative and non-normative experiences during the first years of adulthood, but it presents a framework for predicting more and less successful adaptation during the transition to adulthood. It is the events and transitions that occur during this age period that are most likely to be considered, by both younger and older adults, the most significant, key marker events that shape their lives (Elnick, Margrett, Fitzgerald, & Labouvie-Vief, 1999; Grob, Krings, & Bangerter, 2001). Despite the fact that adult event transitions (e.g., marriage, parenthood) are rarely considered significant indicators of being an "adult," these events play an important role in the experience of one's life. The extent to which an emerging adult has choice in the process of selecting adult roles and commitments (Rönkä, Oravala, & Pulkkinen, 2003), as well as the extent to which these commitments "fit" an individual, predict successful adaptation (Lerner, 1984).

Facilitated by the availability of both personal and environmental accumulated resources, empirical evidence strongly suggests that conscious exploration and mindful selection of and commitment to adult roles are tied to successful adaptation in emerging adulthood and later stages of adult development. One overarching framework useful for understanding how individuals regulate behavior, development, and adaptation across the life span is the theory of selection, optimization, and compensation (Baltes, 1997). According to this model, emerging adulthood is the critical developmental stage during which individuals select life goals based on available resources and opportunities (Freund & Baltes, 2002; Freund, Li, & Baltes, 1999). Life goals are initiated in adolescence (Lerner, Freund, De Stefanis, & Habermas, 2001) and narrowed, refined, and selected in emerging adulthood (Nurmi, 1993; 1997). The process of articulating and selecting goals, directing one's resources to achieve those goals, and evaluating one's success in meeting identified goals contributes to emerging adult mental health (Nurmi, 1997). For example, Nurmi & Salmelo-Aro (2002) found that depressive symptoms were reduced when emerging adults who had career goals were able to find jobs; among those who had identity goals, depressive symptoms were reduced when they were engaged in contexts that supported identity exploration. In turn, this person-environment fit associated with mental health and personality stability (Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004).

The recentering framework provides a lens useful for understanding the developmental challenges of emerging adults engaged in education and training programs during this critical age period. Recentering describes a normative experience in individual development unique to this age period. Understanding individual development from adolescence to young adulthood has implications for determining sources of heterogeneity in adaptation during this developmental period. Variation in ages at which one enters and completes the recentering process, as well as individual differences in functioning during recentering prescribe two specific aspects of the process that lend themselves to assessment of normative vs. non-normative development (Neugarten, 1968). As follows, a comprehensive understanding of the unique developmental characteristics that distinguish this age period from later stages of adulthood is an advantage in work that aims to optimize emerging adult development and learning and to lay the groundwork for continued growth throughout adulthood.

Unique Features of Emerging Adulthood

Cognitive Development

Over the two past decades, developmental science has progressed in its understanding of emerging adulthood as a critical period for the evolution of adult cognitive structures

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(Labouvie-Vief, 2006). Coincident with advancements in developmental science, exciting progress in neuroscience has identified significant differences between the adolescent and emerging adult brains (Sowell, Thompson, & Toga, 2004). Evidence of brain reorganization associated with rationale decision-making substantiates the assertion that emerging adulthood is a unique and critical developmental period. Reconceptualizing cognitive development to include age-specific changes of this age period provides a target for programs and policies that aim to facilitate development and adjustment.

The brain's center for reasoning and problem-solving fully develops during the period of emerging adulthood, accomplished by a pruning of gray matter (Giedd et al., 1999). There is an increase in white matter across this same period through the mid-thirties. This combination results in change toward fewer, but faster connections (Gogtay, Giedd, Lusk, Hayashi, Greenstein, Vaituzis et al., 2004). Research comparing brain images (MRI) of first-year college students during their first 6 months of school found changes in several brain regions associated with emotion and motivation, including self-awareness (Bennett & Baird, 2006). The authors concluded that a common change in living associated with the transition to college (e.g., moving over 100 miles away from home) has systematic implications for brain development. Whereas adolescence is the final era of brain plasticity, emerging adulthood corresponds with the final phase of organization of the adult brain—specifically in areas involving the integration of cognition and emotion. In sum, brain processes associated with emotion-regulation and decision making continue to develop through the twenties, identifying a physiological task underlying emerging adult behavior and thinking.

Brain maturation during this age period is reflected in key theories of cognitive development that describe emerging cognitive structures post-adolescence. Perry (1970, 1981), Schaie (1977), and Labouvie-Vief (1980, 1985) have advanced developmental theories indicating that emerging adulthood is a developmental stage during which novel cognitive organizations have the potential to develop in service of the demands of adulthood. For example, Perry (1970, 1981) formulated cognitive growth into nine stages, based on his studies of white, male, Harvard students in the 1950s and 1960s. Perry suggested that typical students entering college (initial transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood) are most likely to cognitively operate "dualistically" (stage 2; i.e., there are right and wrong answers known to authorities) and, those leaving college, typically score between stages 4, "multiplicity" (i.e., there are conflicting solutions; knowledge is opinion) and 5, "relativism and procedural knowledge" (i.e., knowledge is derived from informed opinion; some individuals know more than others on a specific topic).

Making the case that adults change in the ways that they use intellect, Schaie (1977) advanced two stages of adult cognitive development that emerge in response to the demands of adulthood: the achieving and responsibility stages. Following the acquisition stage that reigns during childhood and adolescence, the achieving stage dominates emerging adulthood where previously acquired knowledge is used to establish oneself in the world. In this stage the emerging adult focuses on applying the acquired intellectual skills to real life situations requiring practical problem solving abilities. The individual learns to meet her or his needs within a broader social context than family and school. Of particular importance to this process are the cognitive skills required to monitor one's own behavior.

Labouvie-Vief and colleagues' work traces cognitive growth via changes in self-descriptions that increase across distinct levels monotonically with age (Labouvie-Vief, Chiodo, Goguen, Diehl, & Orwoll, 1995; Labouvie-Vief & Meddler, 2002). At the lowest level, concrete-presystemic, involves descriptions of roles and physical features; while at the

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highest level, dynamic-intersubjective, "roles and traits are described at a complex psychological level and reflect awareness of underlying, often unconscious motivation and reciprocal interaction" (Labouvie-Vief, 2006, p. 70). Labouvie-Vief argues that emerging adulthood is a distinctly important age period for the emergence and rapid expansion of complex thought structures. Labouvie-Vief's and colleagues' work and findings are consonant with the theory of emerging adulthood and concept of recentering in that the first years of emerging adulthood lack subjective stability, but cognitive and reflective organization increases as individuals transition to adulthood.

Life-span conceptualizations of intellectual development and ways-of-knowing point to the importance of the emerging adult years for acquiring competence. Baltes' review of research on acquisition of wisdom as "an expertise in the conduct and meaning of life" (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 124) suggests that attaining wisdom-related knowledge and judgment occurs primarily during emerging adulthood, from ages 15 to 25. Across multiple measures of aptitude, there is a decline after maximum levels are achieved in emerging adulthood (i.e., age groups 20–24 and 25–34) in numerical ability, verbal aptitude, clerical perception, finger dexterity, and general intelligence (Avolio & Waldman, 1994). At age 25, there is a point of inflection for cognitive performance where crystallized intelligence (i.e., intelligence as cultural knowledge) stabilizes, but fluid intelligence (i.e., intelligence as basic information processing; Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999) begins to decline. That is, intelligence as a genetically pre-disposed component of cognitive functioning becomes less salient during emerging adulthood (i.e., mechanics), and knowledge that is culture-relevant and culture-dependent, rich and steeped in experience, becomes more salient (i.e., pragmatics). Through age 25, mechanics and pragmatics are equivalent components of cognition.

In addition to theories of general intelligence, two theories of specific intelligences, practical and emotional intelligences, are particularly salient in considerations of optimizing development in emerging adulthood versus earlier periods of development. As the task of recentering moves to center stage for emerging adults, experimenting with and committing to careers and interpersonal relationships may require a different skill set, or a variety of skills that become necessary when faced with the developmental demands of emerging adulthood. Sternberg and Grigorenko (2002) have defined practical intelligence as "intelligence as it applies in everyday life in adaptation to, shaping of, and selection of environments" (p. 215), and suggest it is complementary to but distinct from crystallized intelligence, as measured by IQ tests. In terms of practical solutions to everyday problems, research indicates that 20 year olds demonstrate less experience with all everyday problems, but provide better solutions than older individuals on average—performing significantly better on some individual items and significantly worse on others (Hershey & Farrell, 1999). Such findings suggest that, in terms of everyday competencies, emerging adults function at similar levels as older adults and that cognitive capacity, as measured by IQ tests, academic achievement, and standardized tests may only partially represent individual differences in capabilities.

Emotional intelligence describes an ability, capacity, or *skill* to perceive, assess, and manage the *emotions* of one's self, of others, and of groups. The Mayer-Salovey model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) defines emotional intelligence as the capacity to understand emotional information and to reason with emotions, which has been divided into four basic capacities to: (1) accurately perceive emotions, (2) use emotions to facilitate thinking, (3) understand emotional meanings, and (4) manage emotions (see Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004, for a review). Although there is much controversy concerning the validity of emotional intelligence as a goal of educational practice with children and

adolescents (Waterhouse, 2006), the concept of emotional intelligence has been integrated in work on adult learning (MacKeracher, 2004). Academically succesful first-year college students have been demonstrated to have higher levels of emotional intellgence (Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond, & Hogan, 2005; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004). Considering evidence that more recent cohorts of 18- to 30-year-olds entering the labor market are more likely than past cohorts to value emotional components of their careers and workplace environments (Ng & Burke, 2006; Smola & Sutton, 2002), the salience of emotional intelligence may become a more important determinant of successful employee-employer match associated with productvity and retention.

Personality Development

Just as cognitive changes are believed to underlie the emergence of abstract thinking and identity exploration characteristic of adolescence, brain maturation associated with increased ability to organize and prioritize can be linked to identity consolidation during emerging adulthood. Once considered a key feature of adolescence proper, Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2004) highlights the centrality of achieving identity in emerging adulthood. Cognitive development and maturation of cognitive systems are closely linked to transformations in identity, as well as the actual life experiences that provide opportunities for emerging adults to try out and to choose relevant identities.

Research indicates that the events experienced during emerging adulthood are integrated into individuals' identities and memories more so than those experienced during other age periods (Elnick et al., 1999; Grob et al., 2001; Schuman & Scott, 1989). One explanation for this set of findings is that emerging adulthood is a critical period for the integration of information about one's inner-self as well as one's sociopolitical context. In turn, the shaping of one's identity around salient experiences of the age period has implications for the lens that an individual will use to interpret self-in-society across adulthood.

During emerging adulthood, explorations of multiple roles and relationships gives way to harmonizing one's sense of self. Blos (1962), describing personality development of the postadolescent (between adolescence and adulthood), denoted two stages of identity development, exploration of identity during adolescence and consolidation of identity postadolescence, and noted the following:

> This integration comes about gradually. It usually occurs either preparatory to or coincidentally with occupational choice—provided that circumstances allow the individual any choice at all. The integration goes hand in hand with the activation of social role, with courtship, marriage, and parenthood. The appearance or the manifest role of the young adult—having a job, preparing for a career, being married, or having a child—easily blurs the incompleteness of personality formation. (p. 149)

In sum, adulthood is achieved as a function of consolidation of identity around commitments to careers and families.

Emerging adulthood is a period during which stability of the self is a goal. Empirically, personality traits demonstrate moderate rank-order stability from ages 18 to 26 (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001; Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001); however, these years are marked by lower rank-order stability than in adolescence or later adulthood (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Roberts et al. (2006) found that social dominance, conscientiousness, and emotional stability increased and social vitality

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decreased during this age period compared to changes during later adulthood. Reviewing studies of personality change across the life course, Caspi (1998) concluded that "from late adolescence through early adulthood, most people become less emotionally labile, more responsible, and more cautious" (p. 347). As an exception, Caspi notes that personality change after these years is often associated with specific life events such as the transition to parenthood.

Loevinger's model of ego development (1976) has been used to frame empirical investigations of personality maturation through nine sequential stages, each of which represents a progressively more complex way of perceiving oneself in relation to the world. Ego development is primarily concerned with "impulses and methods for controlling impulses, personal preoccupations and ambitions, interpersonal attitudes and social values" (Blasi, 1998, p. 15). Maturation of ego development increases with age, approximately half a stage per year, but growth slows in emerging adulthood, plateauing at the median stage, self-aware (Cohn, 1998; Westenberg & Gjerde, 1999). The self-aware person sees alternatives, but still in stereotypic categories like age, sex, marital status, and race, rather than in terms of individual differences in traits and needs. Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt (2001) found that from ages 18 to 26, male and female emerging adults demonstrate increases in self-constraint, moving away from impulsive behavior to greater self-control, demonstrating more reflective, deliberate, and planful behavior. Lasser and Snarey's (1989) interviews with high school students transitioning to college revealed that at the lowest level (pre-conformist) young women report a lack of confidence in their abilities to function independent of their parents, and that at middle stages of ego development (including the self-aware stage), young women are conflicted over their budding independence and ability to maintain attachments with parents. In contrast, at the highest levels of ego development (post-conformist) young women simultaneously express eagerness to gain independence without conflict regarding maintenance of attachment with families-of-origin.

Research on trajectories of ego development across adolescence (ages 14 to 17) indicates that emerging adults (at age 25) who attain or maintain higher levels of ego development report more complex sharing of experiences, more collaborative conflict-resolution strategies, and greater interpersonal understanding; and their young adult peers rate them as less hostile and more flexible (Henninghausen, Hauser, Billings, Shultz, & Allen, 2004). Level of ego development in early emerging adulthood has implications for gains associated with adult self-sufficiency and identity development. For example, Schultz and Selman (1998) found that at age 23, emerging adults with higher levels of ego development have better skills negotiating intimacy and autonomy in close interpersonal relationships compared to those at lower levels (Schultz & Selman, 1998). Similarly, emerging adults classified as higher in ego development at age 21, assessed later at age 52, scored higher in tolerance, achievement via independence, responsibility, and psychological mindedness than those at lower levels of ego development (i.e., self-aware and lower; Helson & Roberts, 1994).

Sense-of-control and mastery over one's environment increases across emerging adulthood (Lewis, Ross, & Mirowsky, 1999). Roberts, Caspi, and Moffitt (2001) also found increases in agentic traits, achievement and social potency which represent pleasure derived from meeting environmental challenges (e.g., establishing a career). Parent education, more than income, is associated with emerging adults' overall sense of control and increases in agency in emerging adulthood (Lewis et al., 1999). Collectively, these studies conclude that increases in mastery result from engagement in roles that, in turn, promote independence—either geographical or financial. Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett

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(2005) also found that agency is related to individualization, exploration, and flexible commitment.

Therefore, emerging adulthood is a period of personality development showing plasticity, as demonstrated by empirical studies of change during the age period. The flexibility of personality during emerging adulthood suggests a window of opportunity for shaping personality in the sense that identity remains open and ego development remains amenable. Implications for programs of learning and development during emerging adulthood include the need to consider the process of identity development during these years and understanding the potential for learning experiences to shape individual development beyond this life stage. Moreover, programs designed to encourage learning and development during this age period have the potential to capitalize on this underlying developmental process by using methods that link identity processes with program goals.

Mental Health Problems

A wide-range of mental health problems may interfere with development and learning during emerging adulthood. Serious psychiatric disorder plays a significant role in a large minority of emerging adults' lives. Epidemiologic data indicate that emerging adulthood is a high-risk period for psychiatric disorder. Twelve-month prevalence of psychiatric disorder has been estimated at 25% for 18- 29-year-olds (Robins & Regier, 1991) and 37% for 15- to 24-year-olds (Kessler et al., 1994) in large-scale population studies—higher than in older adult age groups. Lifetime prevalence of any psychiatric disorder has recently been estimated at 52.4% for emerging adults (18–29) and 55.0% for individuals in their thirties and forties, compared to 46.5% for middle-aged (45- to 59-year-olds) and 26.1% for older adults (greater than age 60; Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, & Walters, 2005). In a community sample followed from childhood, lifetime rates of psychiatric disorder increased from ages 21 to 30 (Tanner, Reinherz, Beardslee, Fitzmaurice, Leis, & Berger, 2007). Tracing 12-month prevalence of specific disorders in the same community sample demonstrated decreases in 12-month prevalence of alcohol and drug use disorders, as well as phobias. No significant change in prevalence of major depression or posttraumatic stress disorder was observed.

There is ample evidence to suggest that serious psychopathology affects emerging adults not only via active disorder, but also as a function of past disorder. By age 24, 75% of those who will ever meet criteria for psychiatric disorder will have experienced onset (Kessler et al., 2005), and approximately 75% of emerging adults meeting criteria for a psychiatric disorder have a developmental history (Kim-Cohen, Caspi, Moffitt, Harrington, Milne, & Poulton, 2003; Newman, Moffitt, Caspi, Magdol, Silva, & Stanton, 1996). Psychiatric disorder occurring prior to emerging adulthood has been associated with impaired functioning during these years across a variety of domains (Fergusson & Woodward, 2002; Paradis, Reinherz, Giaconia, & Fitzmaurice, 2006; Reinherz, Giaconia, Carmola Hauf, Wasserman, & Silverman, 1999; Wittchen, Nelson, & Lachner, 1998). Both active and past psychiatric disorder experienced during emerging adulthood is also related to poorer functioning in interpersonal and socioeconomic domains in young adulthood (Tanner et al., 2007).

Classic studies of general mental health of Americans from the mid-1950s through the mid-1970s indicate that the mental health of emerging adults may be significantly different from older adults. Individuals aged 20 and 29 reported higher levels of worries, lower satisfaction with life, were most likely to report having a problem that requires

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professional help, and reported the highest frequency of being overwhelmed compared to middle-age and older adults. Interestingly, they also reported the highest level of happiness with their current life stage and optimism, or "future morale" (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981). Sources of happiness derived from marriage, interpersonal relationships (for men), and jobs were higher among 20–29 year olds compared to older adults. However, sources of unhappiness and worries from marriage and jobs, as well as economic and material issues and personal characteristics were also higher in emerging compared to older adults. These mid-century results foreshadow Arnett's research concluding that the emerging adult years represent an age period of simultaneous excitement and optimism, as well as reactive stress.

Developmental studies that rely on measures of mental health problems other than those used by the medical establishment (i.e., psychiatrists) to assess mental health problems suggest that mental health problems subside, on average, from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Schulenberg and colleagues reported aggregate-level increases in perceived social support, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, and significant decreases in loneliness, fatalism, self-derogation, and substance use from ages 18 to 21/22 (Schulenberg, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 2000). Galambos, Barker, and Krahn (2006) found evidence of intraindividual increase in self-esteem and decrease in anger and depressive symptoms from ages 18 to 25. It has been determined that both incidence (Newman et al., 1996) and 12-month prevalence of psychiatric disorder (Tanner et al., 2007) decrease from 21 to 30. Masten and colleagues found that resilience in the face of childhood and adolescent diversity was maintained in emerging adulthood despite the developmental challenges, and also reported that the age period revealed new cases of resilience (Masten, Burt, Roisman, Obradovic, Long, & Tellegen, 2004; Masten, Obradovic, & Burt, 2006).

Comparing emerging adulthood to later stages of development, on the other hand, indicates that mental health problems are higher in emerging adults than older adults. Mirowsky and Ross (1999) found that rates of depression were higher in the twenties compared to all older age groups, except those in their eighties. Roberts, Caspi, and Moffitt (2001) found a decrease in negative emotionality across the twenties, specifically in regard to feelings of alienation and aggression, but Charles, Reynolds, and Gatz (2001) reported that negative affect is highest in the twenties compared to the later adult years. Prospective studies have also revealed that individuals are less depressed and more mentally healthy at 70 than in early adulthood (Vaillant, 2002). Latent growth models reflecting change in psychological health from ages 14 to 62 indicate stability through age 30 followed by steady increase (Jones & Meredith, 2000).

Grouping individuals based on their mental health problems in adolescence and following them into emerging adulthood indicates that some adolescents afflicted by serious psychopathology are likely to experience persistence into emerging adulthood, but those with low levels of mental health problems are unlikely to experience mental health problems in emerging adulthood. Hofstra and colleagues (Hofstra, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2001) found that approximately 1 in 5 adolescents (22.3%) with "high" mental health problems remained in the high group 10 years later in emerging adulthood. This finding corresponds with findings from a national epidemiologic study estimating that serious psychopathology is concentrated in a small percentage (22.3%) of the adult U.S. population (Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005). In contrast, nearly 70% of those "low" in mental health problems in adolescence were classified as low in emerging adulthood (Hofstra, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2001) and very few reported high problems in emerging adulthood. They found stronger downward compared to upward

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re-classification. In emerging adulthood, 56.5% of the high group in adolescence had moved into the "moderate" category, and 21.2% were classified in the low group. From the low group, only 27.5% were rated moderate in emerging adulthood and only 3.1% were considered high in mental health problems.

While studies of college students are not necessarily representative of the emerging adult population, they provide some insight into mental health issues of a salient sub-population which may or may not indicate population trends. In recent decades, studies of college student mental health reveal that problems may be increasing, particularly problems tied to developmental issues. Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, and Benton (2003) studied changes in therapist reports of student-client problems across three time periods spanning 13 years (period 1: 1988 to 1992; period 2: 1992 to 1996; period 3: 1996 to 2001). Higher problems in more recent cohorts were found in 13 of 19 problem domains (i.e., developmental, situational, medication use, depression, academic skills, grief, relationships, stress/anxiety, family issues, physical problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, sexual assault). There were no significant changes in manifestations of serious psychopathology: eating disorders, substance abuse, chronic mental health problems, and legal problems. Moreover, the authors report that relationship problems was the most commonly endorsed domain of mental health problems associated with seeking counseling service help, but stress/anxiety emerged as the most commonly reported problem in 1994 and remained the most prevalent through 2001. They concluded with the observation that there is an increase in sub-clinical levels of mental health problems reflecting adjustment difficulties in contrast to increasing serious psychiatric disorder.

Considering that both past and current psychiatric problems undermine educational and occupational adjustment, as well as global functioning in emerging adulthood (Paradis et al., 2006; Tanner et al., 2007), educational and training programs should consider the role that mental health plays in successfully meeting program goals. Integrating mental health resources into programs designed to facilitate development and learning with emerging adults are likely to improve program results.

Physical Health

Compared to mental health problems, rates of serious physical disorders (e.g., cancer, heart disease) are low during emerging adulthood. In 2003, the most recent year for which data are available, only 4% of 18- to 24-year-olds self-reported fair or poor health compared to 6% of 24- to 44-year-olds, 12% of 45- to 54-year-olds, and 19% of 55- to 64-year-olds (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005). Predictors of serious physical illness, however, such as obesity and tobacco use, are frequently—and increasingly—observed among emerging adults. Negative health behaviors practiced during this part of the life span may provide the foundation for health problems in later adulthood (Merluzzi & Nairn, 1999).

In the last decade, as rates of overweight and obesity in Americans have risen, obesity has become one of the most significant health problems for emerging adults, as well as perhaps the greatest predictor of health problems in later adulthood. While emerging adults may have lower rates of overweight and obesity than older adults, approximately three-quarters of emerging adults are overweight or obese (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005), which carries serious implications. For example, being mildly or moderately overweight at ages 20–22 is a significant predictor of obesity by ages 35–37 (McTigue, Garrett, & Popkin, 2002) and being seriously overweight or obese elevates the

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risk of heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, and some types of cancer (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005).

The high rates of overweight and obesity seen among emerging adults may be due, in part, to a lack of physical activity. Research has demonstrated a significant decrease in physical activity during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, & Popkin, 2004), which in turn is independently associated with obesity in young adulthood (Tammelin, Laitinen, & Näyhä, 2004). Furthermore, findings from a population-based, longitudinal cohort study show an inverse relationship between fitness in emerging adulthood and risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as hypertension and diabetes in middle age, even after controlling for body mass index (Carnethon, Gidding, Nehgme, Sidney, Jacobs, & Liu 2003).

Tobacco use is another negative health behavior with serious consequences for emerging adults. Although cigarette smoking is on the decline, approximately one-quarter of American emerging adults still use tobacco. In 2003, approximately 25% of all males and 22% of all females ages 18–24 reported currently smoking cigarettes, contributing to increased risk of heart disease, stroke, lung and other types of cancer, and chronic lung diseases such as emphysema (National Center for Health Statistics, 2005).

Low rates of physical disease during this age period complement the 98% survival likelihood between ages 15 and 34 (Anderson, Kochanek, & Murphy, 1997). However, statistics highlighting health and low rates of mortality and morbidity obscure unique causes of mortality that account for 70% of the deaths in this age group compared to only 8% in the overall population. These are motor vehicle accidents, homicide, HIV infection and suicide, all significantly contributing to the social costs of injury and violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Among 26 countries representing Asia, Europe, North America, Latin America, and Oceania, U.S. mortality statistics for each cause of death are outliers across all industrialized nations (Heuveline, 2002). The impulsive and risk-taking behaviors and incomplete brain development of emerging adults have both been implicated as risk factors associated with the high rate of preventable death in this age group.

In general, emerging adulthood is characterized by greater physical health than other stages of the life span. However, emerging adults are not invulnerable to poor health or the precursors of serious physical illness. As more risk factors for common adulthood diseases are discovered, these and behaviors that are often accompanied by negative implications for physical health (i.e., tobacco and alcohol use) will need to be targeted in emerging adults.

Family Relationships

The instability and identity explorations experienced by emerging adults co-occur with changes in family relationships. Most significant is a restructuring of the parent–child relationship. From adolescence to young adulthood, the parent–child relationship evolves from a pattern of child dependence on parents to a relationship between two adults characterized by equality (Aquilino, 2006). This change in the parent–child relationship is recognized by emerging adults as one of the most important markers in becoming an adult (Arnett, 1998).

When and how the restructuring of the parent-child relationship occurs is predicted in a large part by where emerging adults live. Emerging adults leaving home to live independently signals parents that their child is becoming an adult and often leads to reduced conflict and power issues in the relationship (Aquilino, 1997). Aquilino (2006)

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recently demonstrated that emerging adults living at or close to home have poorer relationships with their parents than emerging adults living farther away (Aquilino, 2006). Closeness with parents may decrease when a grown child leaves home due to reduced time together, geographic distance, and competing demands in emerging adults' lives. Closeness tends to increase again toward the end of emerging of adulthood, as the emerging adult assumes adult roles such as cohabitation, marriage, and labor force entry. Taking on these adult roles is associated with more supportive and less conflicted parent-child relations (Aquilino, 1997, 2006), perhaps because parents are able to see their children in roles that they themselves have been in for an extended period of time.

As emerging adults move out of their parents' home and establish independence from their parents, they may be living apart from their siblings for the first time in their lives, thus altering the sibling relationship as well. In general, research has shown that sibling closeness and interaction decrease in emerging and young adulthood (Cicirelli, 1994). Decreases in proximity and contact are not necessarily associated with decreased relationship quality, however. Research comparing sibling relationships in emerging adulthood with those in adolescence found that emerging adults spend less time and are less involved in joint activities with their siblings than adolescents, but are more involved in emotional exchanges and feel more warmth toward their siblings than adolescents (Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). In addition, emerging adults have a more mature perspective on their sibling relationships than adolescents. Emerging adults are better able than their adolescent counterparts to understand and respect their siblings' needs, which may play a role in the finding that emerging adults report less intense sibling conflict and rivalry than adolescents (Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). Furthermore, conflict in emerging adult sibling interactions is not associated with closeness, suggesting that a close sibling relationship in emerging adulthood is not necessarily dependent on the absence of conflict or negative affect in the way that sibling relationships in adolescence often are (Shortt & Gottman, 1997).

Family support during emerging adulthood often comes in the form of material and financial support through residence in the parental household, paying for college, financial subsidies that allow the emerging adult to live independently, or health insurance coverage (Aquilino, 2006). In addition, parents often help support their children as they establish independent households and have their own children (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). A study designed to quantify how much financial assistance and time (e.g., child care, errands, etc.) youth actually receive from their families demonstrated that American emerging adults receive a significant amount of support from their families. Forty-eight percent of 18- to 26-year-olds living independently receive financial help from their parents averaging $2,032 annually (US$, 2001) and 54% of the same demographic receive an average of 488 hours or 12 weeks of full-time, 40 hours per week, support in time per year. Emerging adults living with their parents receive even more assistance. On average, 18- 26-year-olds living at home (college and non-college) receive $4,827 (US$, 2001) in financial help per year (Schoeni & Ross, 2005).

Differences in resources provided by families is one source of heterogeneity predicting pathways to self-sufficiency. Families tend to provide greater resources to emerging adults in their first few years of emerging adulthood compared to the later years. Emerging adults aged 18 to 20 receive, on average, $3,499 a year; those aged 25–26 receive, on average, $2,323 a year (Schoeni & Ross, 2005). Emerging adults from low-income families receive less financial support than those from high-income families, but equal amounts of time from parents. Cross-national and economic trends influence intergenerational transfers (Lee, Lee, & Mason, 2006; Mason, Lee, Tung, Lai, & Miller,

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2006). Emerging adults from families with lower socioeconomic status (SES) moved into financial independence earlier, but accelerated more slowly than emerging adults from higher SES families. Female emerging adults from low SES families moved into relationships and parenting more quickly than female emerging adults from higher SES families; males from lower SES families also moved into the parenting role more quickly than their higher SES peers (Cohen et al., 2003). These differences did not disappear when education was considered in the associations. In addition to family income (Avery, Goldscheider, & Speare, 1992), family dynamics such as parental divorce (Aquilino, 2005; Wolfinger, 2003) and high conflict marriages (Amato & Afifi, 2006) influence variation in parental economic support of emerging adult children and home-leaving patterns.

Family relationships, particularly between parents and the emerging adult child, and support received from family members have important implications for successful outcomes in adulthood. The developmental tasks of the emerging adult period present as a challenge to some, making family support during this transition crucial. Research drawing upon a college sample found that both maternal and paternal support predict emerging adult psychological adjustment (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994) and support from siblings has been shown to play a role in psychological adjustment as well. High levels of sibling social support are associated with lower levels of loneliness and depression and higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Milevsky, 2005).

Friendships

Development of intimate relationships and friendships are believed to be an important task of the emerging adult period, particularly because they are considered a resource that help youth master other developmental tasks (Crosnoe, 2000). For example, competence in friendships in emerging adulthood has been shown to be predictive of competence not only in friendships, but also in the areas of work and romantic relationships, in young adulthood (Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004). In addition, friendships have significant consequences for emerging adult psychological adjustment and well-being (Bagwell et al., 2005).

Emerging adult friendships appear similar to those of adolescents. Number of friends remains fairly constant during this period and although the amount of time spent with friends is greatest during adolescence, it stays relatively high during emerging adulthood (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). In addition, studies of emerging adult friendships demonstrate that factors characteristic of adolescent friendships such as loyalty, warmth, and sharing of personal experiences remain important (Samter, 2003).

Gender differences present in adolescent friendships also appear to persist into emerging adulthood. Similar to male adolescents, male emerging adults report that time with friends revolves around active pursuits, while female emerging adults report that the majority of their time with friends involves talking (Samter, 2003). Furthermore, emerging adult males report the conversations they have with their same-sex friends center on sports, work, and cars (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982) while emerging adult females are more likely to talk to their friends about themselves, their problems, and their close relationships (Johnson & Aries, 1983). Likewise, research has demonstrated that emerging adult women provide and receive higher levels of support from their friends than men (Fischer, Sollie, Sorell, & Green, 1989). Conversations with close friends in emerging adulthood can be critical in helping to explore and identify a sense of self (Johnson & Aries, 1983).

Friendships may be the most important type of emerging adult relationships. In one

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of the earliest studies of close relationships across the life span, Shulman (1975), found that when asked to describe the people who composed their personal network, emerging adults (ages 18–30) were significantly more likely not to name any family members (41%) than were young adults (ages 31–44; 34%) and older adults (over age 45; 23%). In addition, emerging adults report that their relationships with their friends are closer, more important, more reciprocal, and characterized by greater positive feelings than their relationships with their siblings (Pulakos, 2001). These findings may be due to the independence emerging adults seek to establish from their families (Pulaskos, 2001).

Indeed, friendships in emerging adulthood are largely predicated on the many transitions that occur during this period of the life span. Role changes associated with career entry appear to be related to a partial withdrawal from friends during emerging adulthood (Fischer, Sollie, Sorell, & Green, 1989). In one study, single emerging adults reported that friends were their most preferred companions or confidants whereas married emerging adults reported that their spouse was the most preferred to fill these roles (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998). Overall, friendships may reach their peak of functional significance during emerging adulthood, when friends are most likely to fill the role of companion and confidant and are a primary source of social support (Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998).

Considering the salience of friendships during emerging adulthood, it is logical that the quality of emerging adults' relationships with their best friend is related to their adjustment and well-being. Recent research drawing upon an undergraduate sample demonstrated that emerging adults whose friendships are characterized by high levels of conflict and antagonism are more likely to report higher levels of overall symptoms and higher levels of symptoms of hostility and anxiety while emerging adults whose friendships are characterized by greater social support report having higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depression symptoms (Bagwell et al., 2005). Similarly, Berry and colleagues (2000) found that ratings of positive and negative affectivity significantly and independently predict the extent to which emerging adults feel close to and are irritated by their friends, respectively, and that emerging adults with high levels of neuroticism have friendships characterized by higher levels of conflict than emerging adults with high levels of agreeableness (Berry, Willingham, & Thayer, 2000).

Intimate Relationships

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is the period of the life span when individuals typically form enduring romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000) and strive to complete intimacy tasks (Erikson, 1982). The small but growing body of research on intimate relationships in emerging adulthood provides evidence that romantic beliefs and behaviors, rates of partnership, and relationship duration and quality differ between emerging adults and adolescents and older adults. While first kisses, first dates, falling in love and sexual intercourse typically occur during adolescence, first serious relationships do not occur until emerging adulthood (Regan, Durvasula, Howell, Ureño, & Rea, 2004). Participants in one longitudinal study were more likely to report having a romantic partner in emerging adulthood (65%) than they were in middle (43%) or late (47%) adolescence, and their emerging adult relationships continued for longer (21.3 months) than their relationships in adolescence (5.1 and 11.8 months for middle and late adolescence, respectively; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). The frequency of opposite-sex socializing then levels off in young adulthood (Reis, Lin, Bennett, & Nezlek, 1993).

Romantic beliefs and perceptions also vary by stage of the life span. Compared to

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adolescents, emerging adults are less likely to endorse the romantic belief of idealization (love will be nearly perfect) but do not differ in beliefs of a one and only love partner (there is only one person for each of us) and in love at first sight (Montgomery, 2005). However, emerging adults express higher levels of passionate feelings and intimacy than adolescents (Montgomery, 2005) and perceive their romantic partners as providing more social support in emerging adulthood than in late adolescence (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). In a study of romantic love across the life course, Montgomery and Sorell (1994) found that unmarried emerging adults' attitudes toward their relationships are more likely to be characterized by possessiveness and dependency and are less likely to be characterized by an altruistic, selfless love than young and middle-aged married adults. In addition, emerging adults report less relationship satisfaction than older adults. Emerging adults' attitudes do not differ from older adults, however, in terms of physical and emotional attraction or the friendship aspects of love.

Predictors of romantic relationships and intimacy in emerging adulthood include both individual characteristics as well as aspects of an individual's family-of-origin. Parenting (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005), family cohesion, mother's marital satisfaction (Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998), family aversive relationship communication (Andrews, Foster, Capaldi, & Hops, 2000), parent divorce (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001), and family adaptability (Robinson, 2000) have all been shown to be related to romantic relationships in emerging adulthood. Individual characteristics including self negative-emotionality (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005), antisocial behavior (Andrews, Foster, Capaldi & Hops, 2000), and attachment style (Koski & Shaver, 1997) have also been shown to be associated with emerging adult intimate relationships. In addition, a positive relationship exists between support from one's family and friends and feelings of love, satisfaction, and commitment for both male and female emerging adults (Surra, 1990). Furthermore, social support significantly predicts relationship quality up to a year and a half later, and for females, as support from families and friends increases, relationship stability increases (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992).

A significant proportion of emerging adult romantic relationships involve cohabitation. In 2003, 15.1% of 20- to 24-year-old males and 20.9% of 20- to 24-year-old females reported living with an unmarried partner (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Cohabitation among emerging adults, although receiving increased attention in recent years, is certainly not a new phenomenon. An article published in 1975 reported that cohabitation was the fastest growing life style among 18–24 year olds. Compared with 1960, 50 times as many men and 16 times as many women aged 18–24 reported living with an unmarried partner in 1970 (Lincoln, 1975). An exploratory study of the timing and decision to enter into a cohabitating union showed that emerging adults' decisions to cohabit are based on finances, convenience, their housing situations, because they simply wanted to, and in response to parents/family. Surprisingly, living with a partner as a trial or way to determine compatibility for marriage was the least frequently cited reason for deciding to cohabit (Sassler, 2004). However, cohabitation often leads to marriage. In a cohort born in 1961 in which one-third of the participants experienced cohabitation without marriage by age 23, 50% of the female participants and two-thirds of the male participants who entered into a marital union cohabited prior to doing so (Thornton, 1988).

Based on the 2001 Census, 49% of men and 63% of women who will ever marry, do so by age 29 (Kreider, 2005). Men, on average marry a woman 2 years younger (Martinez, Chandra, Abma, Jones, & Mosher, 2006). Divorce rates for men are estimated at 1% for men between the ages of 20 and 24, and 7.5% between the ages of 25 and 29. For women, respective estimates are higher at 2.6% and 11.9%. For those between the ages of 25 and

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29, 15% of the ever-married men and 18.9% of the ever-married women have experienced a divorce (Kreider, 2005).

Sex, fertility, and childbearing play an important role in emerging adults' intimate relationships and partnering. By age 20, 75% of American youth have had premarital sex, by age 30 the figure reaches 90% (Finer, 2007). Despite the commonness of sexual behavior during this age period, there are few studies or reviews of sexual experience and development in emerging adulthood (see, for exception, Lefkowitz & Gillen, 2006). There is some information on sexual identity development among heterosexual (Hoffman, 2004), homosexual, and bisexual (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006) populations that provide a general framework for considering the role of sexuality in emerging adults' lives. However, this topic represents an understudied and underexplored component of emerging adult experience and development.

Rates of pregnancy, abortion, and childbearing provide information concerning the number of emerging adults who experience these events. Approximately 1 in 6 emerging adults experience pregnancy in a given year; women aged 20–24 have the highest pregnancy rate followed by women aged 25–29 (1999; Ventura, Abma, Mosher, & Henshaw, 2003). In 2001, 60% of all pregnancies of 20- to 24-year-old emerging adult women were unintended, 43% among those aged 25 to 29 (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). The unintended pregnancy ratio is highest for women in emerging adulthood, ages 20 to 24, and the unintended pregnancy rate rose between 1994 and 2001 for the 25- to 29-year-old age group (Finer & Henshaw, 2006). Representing 33% of abortions performed between 2000–2001, over one-quarter of a million emerging adult women aged 20 to 24 had an abortion. The second highest percentage by age group was for 25- to 29-year-olds, 23.1% (Jones, Darroch, & Henshaw, 2002; Strauss, Herndon, Chang, Parker, Bowens, & Berg, 2005). In a longitudinal study of adolescent and emerging adult development, Fergusson and colleagues reported that 41% of emerging adult women had become pregnant by age 25 and 14.6% of them reported having an abortion (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2006).

Women aged 25 to 29 years had the highest U.S. birth rate of 115.5 per 1,000 births in 2004 (Hamilton, Ventura, Martin, & Sutton, 2005). Of those emerging adults who marry between ages 20 and 22, 82% have a first birth within 4 years; 70% of those who marry at age 23 or older have a first birth within 4 years (Abma, Chandra, Mosher, Peterson, & Piccinio, 1997). Among unmarried mothers, in 2004, childbearing reached a record high of almost 1.5 million births. Over one-half of births to women in their early twenties and nearly 3 in 10 births to women aged 25–29 years were to unmarried women. The birth rate among unmarried women of all ages increased 3%t from 2003 to 2004. In 2004, 35.7% of all births were to unmarried women (Hamilton, Ventura, Martin, & Sutton, 2005).

The relationship between education and learning and partnering and parenting in emerging adulthood is complex. However, attempts to facilitate trajectories of educational attainment, training completions, and successful school-to-work transitions must heed empirical evidence that demonstrates the co-mingling of education, careers, relationships and childbearing during emerging adulthood (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Teachman & Polonko, 1988).

Media and Leisure

Although the topic of leisure and free-time activity has received the attention of researchers since the 1970s, the majority of work in this area is cross-sectional in design and

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has focused mainly on children and adolescents or older adults, leaving many questions regarding age differences and changes in leisure activity across the life span unanswered. In general, it appears as if the most significant changes in leisure time occur at major transitional phases in one's life (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2001). Accordingly, in emerging adulthood, a period characterized by multiple transitions, time devoted to leisure use differs from adolescence or later adulthood.

Research examining the role that life transitions play in leisure pattern stability during the transition to adulthood provides support for this claim. Raymore, Barber, and Eccles (2001) demonstrated that for female emerging adults, going to college and or leaving home is associated with stability of leisure patterns while becoming a partner and/or a parent is associated with change in time devoted to leisure. For males, only leaving home is associated with leisure activity in emerging adulthood: this transition is predictive of leisure pattern stability.

Similar findings were demonstrated by Gauthier and Furstenberg (2002) in a study of patterns of time use during the transition to adulthood in nine industrialized countries. The amount of time emerging and young adults (ages 18–34) spend on leisure activities (on average 5.5 hours per day) was impacted by the transition from school to work, from being single to being partnered, and the transition to parenthood. Single, employed emerging and young adults devote less time to leisure activities than their student counterparts (a decrease of 0.6 hours per day), and transitioning from being single to being partnered is associated with a decrease of 0.5 hours per day in time spent on leisure activities for both males and females. The transition to parenthood has the largest effect on leisure: there is a decrease of 0.7 hours per day in time spent on leisure activities among emerging and young adult parents (Gauthier & Furstenberg, 2002).

So, what are emerging adults doing with their leisure time? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2005 Americans ages 15–24 spent, per week, 0.54 hours participating in sports and exercise, 1.14 hours socializing and communicating, 2.42 hours watching television, 0.15 hours reading, 0.20 hours relaxing/thinking, 0.64 hours playing games on and using the computer for leisure, and 0.84 hours on other leisure activities, including travel, for a total of 5.55 hours of leisure per week. The only age group who devoted more time to leisure pursuits was Americans ages 65 and older. Although watching TV may be what occupies the majority of leisure time for many emerging adults, a recent Gallup poll (Carroll, 2006) indicates that watching television is not necessarily their preferred activity. When asked to name their favorite way to spend an evening, 41% of 18- to 29-year-olds said their ideal evening involves spending time with family, 14% said watching television, 10% mentioned visiting friends, and 8% reported reading was their favorite way to spend the evening.

It is important that research on leisure activities be expanded upon as emerging adults' leisure behaviors are associated with both psychological (Cassidy, 2005; Haworth & Hill, 1992) and physical health (Gordon-Larsen, Nelson, & Popkin, 2004) and may prove important for adult cognition and learning.

Ethnic and Cultural Issues

Emerging adulthood is culturally bound, existing predominantly "in contemporary industrialized cultures that extend the transition to adulthood until the mid to late twenties" (Arnett, 1998). There appears to be a period between adolescence and adulthood in many cultures, but this stage varies from culture to culture and within minority cultures in America.

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Research on emerging adulthood in countries other than America is scarce but demonstrates that the phenomenon does indeed exist in various forms. For example, there is support for emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period in China, but it is less individualistic than it is in the United States (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004). In a study by Nelson and colleagues, when asked what criteria signified reaching adulthood, Chinese college students most frequently endorsed "accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions," "learn to have good control of your emotions," and "become financially independent from your parents." American emerging adults frequently select the first and last criteria as well (see Figure 2.2). Other responses clearly reflected the collectivistic values and greater importance of obligations toward others characteristic of Chinese culture (Badger, Nelson, & Barry, 2006). Almost all of the students surveyed (89%) endorsed "become capable of supporting parents financially" and "become less self-oriented and develop greater concern for others" (93%) as necessary criteria for attaining adult status (Nelson et al., 2004).

In Argentina, a country that belongs to the Western, Christian, urban, and industrialized cultural group, emerging adulthood exists as a period of the life course for Argentinians in their mid-twenties due to the postponement of marriage and parenthood and continuing education after graduating from high school that are common there (Facio & Micocci, 2003). Argentinians experience emerging adulthood similar to youth in the United States; a longitudinal study of young Argentinians demonstrated that emerging adults experience diverse employment situations and intimate relationships. However, living arrangements are typically more stable than those seen among emerging adults in America. The majority of emerging adults who are not married or cohabitating live with their parents or other relatives; only 12% reported living alone (Facio & Micocci, 2003).

Like emerging adulthood in countries outside of the United States, little is known about this age period among American minority cultures and ethnicities. The extant research suggests that young Americans experience emerging adulthood, regardless of

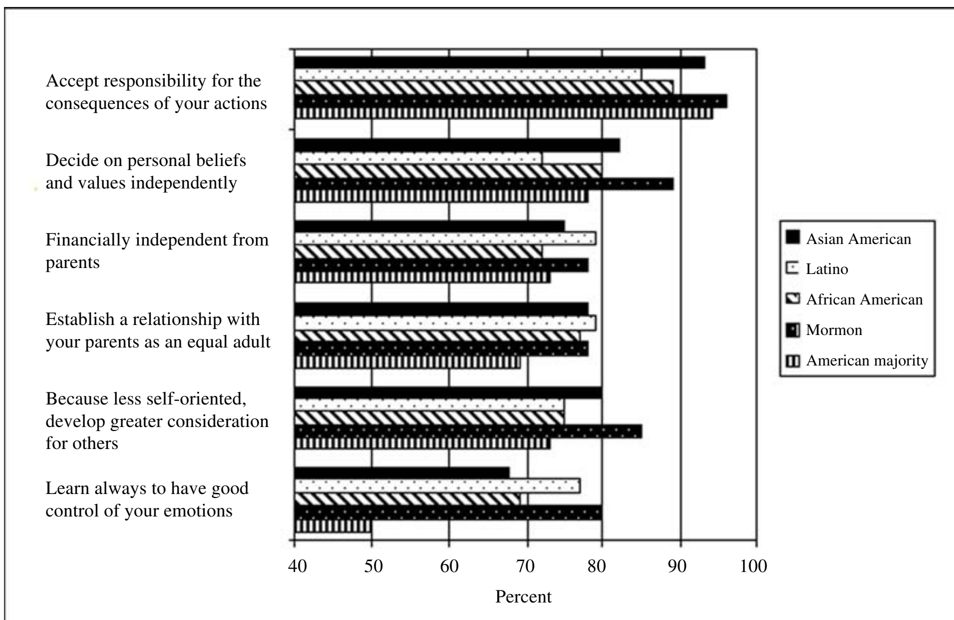

Figure 2.2 Percent indicating that a criterion is necessary for adulthood, by cultural or ethnic group (Arnett, 2003).

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culture or ethnicity. However, emerging adults from minority groups, similar to those in other countries, endorse both individualistic and collectivist criteria as necessary requisites for adulthood. For example, results from a study of the transition to adulthood in four American ethnic groups (i.e., Caucasian Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) indicates that at least 70% of emerging adults across all four groups view the same four criteria (see Figure 2.2) as necessary in order for a person to be considered an adult (Arnett, 2003). In contrast to Caucasian Americans, emerging adults in ethnic minority groups are more likely to favor criteria for adulthood that reflect obligations to others. Emerging adults in all three minority groups endorsed "become less self-oriented, develop a greater consideration for others," as one of the top five criteria associated with transition to adulthood.

Emerging adulthood is also a distinct developmental period in at least some religious minorities in the United States. Youth from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church), for example, experience a delay between adolescence and young adulthood, although it is shorter and more structured than emerging adulthood among the American majority (Nelson, 2003). Nelson (2003) has suggested several reasons for this variation. First, the rise in the age of marriage in the United States, a key factor that has contributed to the extended period between adolescence and young adulthood, did not occur among Mormons. Thus the median age of marriage among Mormons is lower than the age of marriage for the U.S. population as a whole, shortening this period of exploration. Second, there are several religious rites of passage that young Mormons experience during the emerging adult years that culminate with adult status in the eyes of the church and community. These rites of passage add structure to the experience of emerging adulthood and emphasize the collectivist perspective of the Mormon Church. Accordingly, the criteria for adulthood most frequently endorsed by young Mormons differ from the criteria of the majority of American emerging adults. Similar to emerging adults in minority ethnic groups in the United States and those in other countries, Mormons endorse both individualistic criteria as well as more collectivist criteria (see Figure 2.2).

Education, Careers, and Financial Independence

The diversity of emerging adult experiences is reflected in the many different pathways they take from formal education, into the world of work, toward financial self-sufficiency. The age at which an individual leaves secondary education, the age at which one enters the labor market, and the pattern of job-holding that follows the exit from formal education each account for variation in the school-to-work transition. In 2000, 86.5% of 18- to 24-year-olds had completed high school. Of the 13% of emerging adults who had not completed high school by age 24 (in 2000), some persisted in their pursuit of a high school diploma into their twenties (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In more recent years, rates of leaving high school before earning a diploma have decreased; however, race and ethnic differences persist. Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to leave high school before earning a degree (Child Trends, 2007).

Rates of high school completion, graduation with associates and bachelor's degrees, as well as advanced professional degrees have each increased significantly during the past century. Due to increases in more recent years in the number of individuals who have completed both high school and college degrees, the proportion of emerging adults ages 25 to 29 with diplomas is equivalent to the proportion of all adults age 25 and older holding the same degree. Of all adults age 25 and older, in 2005, 85% had at least a high

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school diploma, 28% had earned a bachelor's degree. In 1985, these numbers, respectively, were 74% and 19% indicating an increase in the percentage of the adult population competing in the labor market with high school and bachelors degrees (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Educational Attainment in the United States, 2005).

Those who do not enroll in 4-year college programs after high school have been labeled the *forgotten half* (W. T. Grant Foundation, 1988), because they represent a vulnerable population, less likely to make transitions to stable, sustaining employment. Economic prospects of this high-risk group declined from the early to the late 1990s (W. T. Grant Foundation, 1998). Of the emerging adult population who leave high school before earning a degree, a significant proportion return to complete a GED, but only some succeed. Of the 53% of high school dropouts accounted for in the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (ages 14 to 22 in 1979; interviewed in 2002), 28% earned a high school (general equivalency) diploma and 14% earned at least some college education. The pathway taken by those who drop-out and go on to earn a GED widens the racial and ethnic gap. By age 35, 6% of whites, 10% of blacks, and 15% of Hispanics or Latinos had not completed high school; and greater than 30% of whites but only 12% of blacks and Hispanics or Latinos had earned college degrees (Yates, 2005).

While those who do not complete college may be more vulnerable on some economic measures, some have argued against the "college-for-all" policy, citing the need to focus broadly on connecting high school graduates to training and careers that match their interests (Rosenbaum, 2002; Rosenbaum & Person, 2003). One established method for connecting non-college-enrolled youth with training and career opportunities is via adult education programs and trainings. Overall, 44% of the U.S. population aged 16 and older participated in adult education 2004–2005; 53% of 16- to 24-year-olds were involved in some form of adult education, higher than any other age group (O'Donnell, 2006). Emerging adults were more likely than older persons to be involved in GED programs and part-time college programs, as well as personal interest courses, and were less likely to be involved in work related trainings (O'Donnell, 2006).

Disparities in educational attainment in emerging adulthood have implications for wages earned across the life span. Lifetime earnings (i.e., synthetic work-life earnings, 1999 US$) for individuals with a high school diploma are estimated at $1.2 million, almost double, $2.1 million for an individual with a bachelor's degree, and $4.4 for an individual with a professional degree (Day & Newburger, 2002). Earning trajectories indicate that for all degree categories except doctoral degrees, annual earnings for 25- to 29-year-olds is under $50,000. By ages 30–34 the earning trajectories of those with bachelor's degrees and higher accelerate past $50,000/year, continuing to increase through the mid-sixties. The earning trajectories of those with associate's degrees and less education do not rise above $50,000/year, representing a relatively flat trajectory (Day & Newburger, 2002). Despite the variation by race, ethnicity, and sex in rates of high school and college completion, earnings differentials between high school and college completers is the same across groups (Perna, 2003).

Higher educational attainment has been linked to establishing career stability and predicts differences in life-span earnings. By age 30, 36.8% of those without a high school diploma had not held an employment relationship for 2 or more years. This was true for only 17.9% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher, despite the former group having a greater number of years of potential employment (calculated from Table 3 of Yates, 2005). The median high school dropout took more than 3 years to start a job that would last a full year, and nearly 11 years before they started a job that would last 3 years. Because less than 50% of the high school dropout sample had yet to hold a job for 5 years

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at age 35, we cannot determine the median number of years. In comparison, the median high school graduate took 6 years to start a job that would last 3 years and 10 years to start one lasting 5 years. Those with a college degree settled into stable employment much more quickly; within a year and a half they started a job that would last 3 years and it took college graduates less than 4 years to start a job that would last 5 years (Yates, 2005).

Strong associations link first occupation upon entry into the labor market with subsequent earnings and occupational prestige (D'Amico, 1985) and delay of entry into careers has developmental implications for the critical task of gaining financial independence. The challenge of gaining financial stability is not an easy task given that individuals in the emerging adult age group have the lowest earnings, across 19 countries, compared to all other periods of adult labor force involvement (OECD, 1998). Despite, or perhaps given the challenge, career success is associated with adaptation. Gaining status, power, and achieving financial independence through good compensation is associated with decreases in negative emotionality and gains in positive emotionality from 18 to 26 (Roberts, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2003).

Conclusion and Implications

The boundary between childhood and adulthood is not as sharp as it used to be. Emerging adulthood now links the two stages. Development and learning during emerging adulthood shapes and is shaped by the distinctiveness of the developmental period. Because emerging adults are unique in their lack of experience in the adult educational and occupational arenas, traditional education and learning goals including imparting knowledge, providing skills-training, and guiding professional development should be designed differently for this age group to optimize potential for achievement.

There is a naturally occurring window during emerging adulthood to provide opportunities for education and learning because such goals are more common in the twenties period than in later age periods (Nurmi, 1992). Moreover, because life-span goals and patterns of stability are determined, to some extent, during this age period, objectives related to optimizing adult learning and development and priming life-span learners take on special significance. That emerging adulthood can be broadly characterized as an exceptional period of plasticity during which the shaping of life goals in positive ways is possible, rests on specific developmental features that are unique to the age period. Understanding the fundamental characteristics of emerging adult development that make it unique from other periods of the life span has significant implications for work that seeks to facilitate life-span learning. Both normative experiences, as well as sources of interindividual differences may impact and influence pathways of growth and maturation.

The subjective experience of emerging adulthood is critical for tapping into their unique motivations for learning and development. Part of the experience of emerging adulthood is an openness to experience, an eagerness to try new things, and a willingness to learn. Few emerging adults want to obtain a job at 20 that they will have until they are 65. Adulthood is attractive in some ways because it means more stability, but also repellent because emerging adults fear it means stagnation. They expect to continually revise their identities through challenges and new experiences and tend to expect that work will be interesting and fun. They fear that becoming an adult means you no longer grow. One way to avoid this is through continuous learning, perhaps indicated by increasing rates of post-graduate studies after college (U.S. Department of Education, 1999a) and increasingly high rates of enrollment in educational programs among middle-age adults

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(U.S. Department of Education, 1999b). Investing in emerging adults through education and facilitating the school-to-work transition for all emerging adults and helping them balance work and family, government can foster an increasingly productive labor force (Fussell, 2002).

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