What is emerging adulthood?

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

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

The graph shows the percentage of 18-24 year-olds with some college enrollment from 1900 to 2000. The trend line indicates a steady increase over the century, with a significant rise in the 1960s and 1970s.
Median U.S. Marriage Age, 1950–2000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industrialized Countries</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Developing Countries</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five features of emerging adulthood

- (Based on 300 interviews with American ages 18-29, diverse backgrounds.)
- In 2012: Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (CUPEA), national sample of 710 18-25-year-olds
- The age of identity explorations
- The age of instability
- The self-focused age
- The age of feeling in-between
- The age of possibilities
The Age of Identity Explorations

- “This is a time of my life for finding out who I really am.” (CUPEA)
- 81% of 18-29s agree
- Trying to find a place in the world in love and work
- Love: searching for a “soul mate”
  ---“When you marry, you want to find your soul mate, first and foremost.” 94% of Americans 20-29 agree (National Marriage Project).
- Work: searching for self-fulfillment; money is not enough.
  ---“They pay well, but I hate my job! There’s no opportunity for growth there.” Tamara, age 22, legal assistant.
The age of instability

- “This time of my life is full of changes.” 86% agree. (CUPEA)
- “This time of my life is full of uncertainty.” 67% agree. (CUPEA)
- Average number of job changes from age 20-29 in U.S.: Seven
Rates of Moving, by Age

Percent Who Moved in Past Year

AGE

10-14x 15-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-44 45-54 55+
The self-focused age:

- More independent from parents
- Not yet tied to others
- “This is a time of my life for focusing on myself.”
  74% agree. (CUPEA)
- “I think I want to get more in touch with myself. I want to be a little selfish for awhile, and selfishness and marriage don't seem to go hand in hand. I'd like to be able to experience as much as I can before I get married, just so I can be well-rounded.” (Rosa, 24 year-old Latina)
The age of feeling in-between

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>12-17x</th>
<th>18-25</th>
<th>26-35</th>
<th>36-55</th>
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</table>
Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?

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

- Accept responsibility for yourself.
- Financial independence
Bottom criteria

- Marriage
- Parenthood
You know where DUDE meets DAD?  

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The age of possibilities

- “At this time of my life, it still seems like anything is possible.”
- 82% of 18-25s agree. (CUPEA)
The age of possibilities:

- Do you think your life will be better or worse than your parents’ lives have been?
- Better 76% of 18-25s. (CUPEA)

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

- Education looms large, now and later.
- EAs from lower class backgrounds feel adult earlier, marry 2 years earlier, have children earlier.
- BUT—the same five features apply across social classes.
Mental health challenges

- High rates of substance use, sexual risk behavior, eating disorders, depression, anxiety disorders.
- Nearly half of 19-25 year-olds in U.S. have had a psychiatric disorder in past year (Blanco et al., 2008).
- “I often feel depressed.” 35% of 18-25s (CUPEA)
- “I often feel anxious.” 58% of 18-25s (CUPEA)
Implications for mental health

- Identity challenges → identity confusion.
- Instability → inconsistent social support.
- Self-focus can be lonely.
- Feeling in-between → anxiety.
- Age of possibilities → disappointment.
- Can be difficult to distinguish a developmental challenge from a mental health problem.
Implication for Mental Health Treatment

- Neither child nor adult system fits them well.
- Age of possibilities unrecognized and untapped.
- Critical period for resilience.
Don’t forget the good news

- “This time of my life is fun and exciting.” 83% of 18-25s agree. (CUPEA)
- “I am confident that eventually I will get what I want out of life.”
- 90% of 18-25s agree. (CUPEA)
• “Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Oxford University Press.

• www.jeffreyarnett.com

• Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood (SSEA) now established! www.ssea.org