

Emerging Adults in America

Coming of Age in the 21st Century

Edited by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett
and Jennifer Lynn Tanner



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The Psychology of Emerging Adulthood: What Is Known, and What Remains to Be Known?

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

Although scattered theory and research on the age period from the late teens through the 20s has taken place for decades (e.g., Bockneck, 1986; Erikson, 1968; Hogan & Astone, 1986; Keniston, 1971; Modell, 1989), only recently has scholarship in this area begun to be organized into a distinct field of study, under the term *emerging adulthood*. This book represents what will hopefully be a major step forward in scholarship on emerging adulthood. Prominent scholars from a wide range of areas were asked to summarize what is known in their area with respect to emerging adulthood and to propose new theoretical ideas and ideas for research. The chapters in this book thus provide an integrated foundation for future scholarship on emerging adulthood. The chapters not only tell us what is known about emerging adulthood today but provide an exciting and challenging research agenda.

Jennifer Lynn Tanner and I chose the subtitle *Coming of Age in the 21st Century* because emerging adulthood is when *coming of age* takes place today in America and other industrialized countries, if coming of age is understood to be the attainment of full adult status. A century ago, G. Stanley Hall published his two-volume magnum opus on adolescence, thus framing for scholars and the general public the nature of coming of age in the 20th century. Today, because adolescence begins earlier and the attainment of full adult status (by nearly any measure) comes later, it makes more sense to distinguish between adolescence (roughly ages 10–18) and emerging adulthood (roughly ages 18–25). Setting out to frame this new period of emerging adulthood is daunting, because what is known is limited in many areas, but also exciting, because this is a new field of scholarship and so many questions offer possibilities for exploration and discovery.

It was the goal of the editors and authors of this book to summarize what is known about emerging adulthood and also to direct attention to what we believe to be some of the most promising unanswered questions. My goal in this final chapter is to provide a commentary on the previous chapters, making connections across chapters and presenting an overview of what the field of

emerging adulthood looks like in its present form. First, I present some thoughts about each chapter. Then I comment on what remains to be known about emerging adulthood.

Theory, Individual Factors, and Contexts in Emerging Adulthood: An Overview

My discussion of the chapters will follow the organizational structure of the book: first theory, then individual factors, and finally contexts.

Emerging Adulthood and Life Span Theory

In the first chapter I summarized my theory of emerging adulthood, discussing the various ways I believe emerging adulthood is distinctive as a developmental period. In addition to asking what is developmentally distinctive about emerging adulthood, psychologists need to understand how emerging adulthood fits into the rest of the life course. Jennifer Lynn Tanner takes on this challenge in her chapter, drawing on life span theory and developmental science. This developmental systems perspective views individual development as a function of the interaction between persons and multiple ecological contexts.

In seeking to understand development in emerging adulthood in relation to life span development, Tanner focuses on two key processes: recentering and ego development. Recentering involves a shift from dependence on parents to *system commitments* in the form of obligations to careers, intimate partners, and (for most people) children. It is during emerging adulthood that this shift takes place, and consequently these years tend to be exploratory and unstable as people try out various possibilities and learn from their experiences before making long-term commitments. The process of recentering is similar to what I have stated about emerging adulthood being characterized by identity explorations and instability (Arnett, 2000, 2004; see chap. 1, this volume), but I like Tanner's term *recentering* and I think the concept is useful as a way of describing in a dynamic way the kinds of changes that take place in emerging adulthood.

Among the notable studies that Tanner describes in her chapter is one by Grob, Krings, and Bangerter (2001), in which they surveyed adults of various ages about their most important life events and the degree of control they felt they had over those events: They found that it is during emerging adulthood that people perceive the most control over the significant events in their lives. This finding is a reflection of emerging adulthood as the self-focused age, the time when people are most likely to have the freedom to make choices as they wish. There is a distinct nadir in social and institutional control during emerging adulthood because during these years parents exercise less influence than they did in childhood or adolescence and most people have not yet entered the social or institutional roles of marriage, parenthood, and long-term employment that provide new constraints. Although there are negative aspects to the lack of social control for some people, as I discuss further later, one positive

aspect of it is the freedom of this period, the peak it represents in people feeling like they have control over their own lives.

In addition to recentering, ego development is the other process Tanner proposes as central to development in emerging adulthood. This concept serves as a master trait representing qualities such as agency, self-regulation, and impulse control. Tanner sees ego development as the key to understanding the variance in developmental trajectories during emerging adulthood. Those who are relatively high in ego development tend to do well, whereas those who are relatively low tend to struggle. The absence of social and institutional control may allow for greater freedom and choice, but it also requires greater resources from individuals. Lack of constraint also means lack of guidance and support. Learning to stand alone is both an aspiration of emerging adults and an expectation for them in industrialized societies (Arnett, 1998), and a substantial amount of ego development is required for success in this developmental task.

Ego development makes possible the construction of life plans that will serve as a guide through emerging adulthood into young adulthood and beyond. As Tanner mentions, the construction of a life plan has been noted by several previous theorists as a developmental task during the 20s. Most notably, Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) argued that the novice phase that takes place during the 20s is when "the Dream" is formulated, that is, an optimistic vision of how one's adult life might be. In my theory of emerging adulthood I have proposed a related idea, that emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities, when many futures still seem possible and most emerging adults believe that adult life will turn out well for them, even if their lives in the present seem unpromising (Arnett, 2004). Perhaps emerging adulthood involves, in part, the paring down of various possibilities to settle on one Dream. Whether ego development is something that aids in this process is an intriguing question that merits further investigation.

Tanner's chapter raises the important issue of the heterogeneity of emerging adulthood and the extent to which the experience of emerging adulthood varies depending on factors such as attending college or not. She makes a case for predicting development in emerging adulthood from variables in earlier development, such as parent-child interactions or parental socioeconomic status (SES). However, I would add the caveat that even when earlier development is a significant predictor of development in emerging adulthood in longitudinal studies, such studies may not predict a substantial amount of the variance in emerging adult variables, which means that more changes than remains the same for most people from childhood to emerging adulthood. For example, parental SES is a significant predictor of emerging adults' college enrollment, but college enrollment among 18 to 21 year olds in the United States rose from less than 5% in 1900 to over 60% in 2000 (Arnett, 2004), so clearly the predictive power of SES from one generation to the next is limited and change does take place.

Once the limitations in predicting emerging adult development from earlier development are recognized, then the challenge becomes to delineate the ways that people change in emerging adulthood, and to explain why. Tanner suggests that college attendance is one crucial context that is the basis of change in emerging adulthood. What other variables matter? This is an important

question for future research, and Tanner's chapter should serve as a useful basis for investigating it.

Cognitive Development

Some readers may be surprised to find a chapter on cognitive development in a book on emerging adulthood. Certainly the vast majority of research on cognitive development focuses on infancy and early childhood, with a smattering of research on middle childhood and adolescence. Isn't cognitive development pretty much over by the time formal operations are attained in adolescence—at least until cognitive abilities begin to decline in old age? The chapter by Gisela Labouvie-Vief provides a forceful corrective to this assumption. Drawing on a wide range of research, including her own, she integrates research on cognition with cognitive-related research on moral development, self-understanding, and affective changes to present a portrait of cognitive development in emerging adulthood as dynamic, diverse, and complex.

Labouvie-Vief begins the chapter by usefully emphasizing that cognitive development always takes place in a cultural context, and that the dramatic and rapid changes in Western cultures over the past century have created new cognitive challenges that require taking into account nonrational cognitive processes, the diversity of possible cognitive perspectives, and the changing nature of knowledge. She then shows evidence that emerging adulthood is a critical stage for the emergence of the complex forms of thinking required in complex societies. However, she emphasizes that emerging adults are diverse in their cognitive development, especially depending on the level of education they receive, and that the most highly developed forms of thinking in emerging adulthood are potentialities that are fulfilled only by some.

The heart of the cognitive change that (potentially) occurs in emerging adulthood is that the person decides on a particular worldview but also recognizes that there is an element of subjectivity in any worldview and diverse points of view should be recognized as adding to the total picture of what the truth is. This is not relativism that views all perspectives as equally valid, but a more complex way of thinking that chooses a worldview judged to be valid while also recognizing that other perspectives may have merit and that no one has a monopoly on the truth. The truth is sought by taking into account and coordinating multiple perspectives and by integrating subjective and objective aspects of knowledge, which requires tolerance for contradiction, diversity, and ambiguity.

The basis for this view is the cognitive-developmental theory originally proposed by Kohlberg (1969) and Perry (1970/1999), which continues to be the basis for the views of many scholars on cognitive development today. However, the major modification made by current scholars is a tendency to see cognitive development in adolescence and beyond as occurring not in *stages* that are universal and ontogenetic but as *levels* that have some relation to age but whose development depends on contextual factors, especially education. As a consequence the levels of cognitive functioning among persons at any given age are diverse. This view fits well with my emphasis on the heterogeneity of

development within the emerging adult years (see chap. 1, this volume). Emerging adults are especially diverse in the types and lengths of education they obtain, and in Labouvie-Vief's view, this fact has crucial implications for their cognitive development, because higher levels of cognitive functioning in emerging adulthood and beyond tend to be related to the amount of education obtained.

Labouvie-Vief presents this case effectively. However, a thorough test of her theoretical stance will require more studies that compare emerging adults with various educational levels, those who attend college as well as those who do not, and those who attend vocational schools or community colleges as well as those who attend 4-year universities. Labouvie-Vief insightfully notes that "education is the very process or means by which culture imparts knowledge to the younger generations" (chap. 3, p. 73) and that this process of generational transmission of cognitive skills has been studied a lot between adults and young children but very little between emerging adults and older adults. Her provocative and original ideas on this topic provide a superb basis for hypotheses to guide further research in this area.

In an especially important section, Labouvie-Vief expands the field's normal thinking about the domains of cognition to include the cognitive aspects of self and emotion, considering the question of how cognition in emerging adulthood is "carried into daily experiences of individuals and expand[s] their emotions and their sense of self and reality" (chap. 3, p. 67). She presents results from her longitudinal-sequential research of persons from age 10 to 80, which shows four levels of adult emotional and self-development. At the higher levels, views of the self become more complex and show greater self-reflection and awareness that the self is something that changes over time. Movement into the higher levels takes place especially in emerging adulthood, when "individuals of the emerging adulthood period begin to profoundly restructure their sense of self" (chap. 3, p. 68).

This insight, that crucial changes take place in emerging adulthood in people's sense of self and capacity for self-reflection, opens up a wide and promising vista for future research. As someone who has interviewed both adolescents and emerging adults in research, I have been struck by how much more self-reflective and insightful emerging adults are. This is as true for noncollege emerging adults as for those who have attended college. In my view, this is one of the characteristics of emerging adults that makes them especially fun to interview and makes the interviews with them especially valuable and rich with information. Perhaps it is, in part, the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood that promotes the development of self-reflection and self-understanding during these years. Undistracted by either the peer whirl of adolescence or the family role demands of young adulthood, emerging adults are able to devote more attention to their sense of self. Labouvie-Vief's emphasis on the restructuring of the self in emerging adulthood also fits well with the idea of emerging adulthood as a time when identity issues are prominent, as these issues often entail self-reflection and the development of self-understanding. In any case, Labouvie-Vief's ideas on the topic in this chapter will hopefully inspire new research that uses her levels as well as other schemes.

Such research could also indicate how cognitive development continues past emerging adulthood into young adulthood, as Labouvie-Vief illustrates in her research on cognitive-affective differences with age. As Labouvie-Vief stresses, although important changes in cognitive development take place in emerging adulthood, some aspects of cognitive development may be substantially more developed in older adults. Furthermore, among same-age emerging adults there is a great range of individual differences in their cognitive functioning. This heterogeneity is worth keeping in mind and exploring further, here as in other areas.

Although Labouvie-Vief is clearly aware of the importance of taking into account the cultural context of cognitive development, nearly all the research she draws from is based on American samples, so it will be important in future research to examine cognitive development among emerging adults in other cultures. Patterns characteristic of the American samples used in most research may or may not apply in other cultures, particularly in cultures that value individualism and diversity relatively less and obedience and conformity relatively more. Perhaps the restructuring of the self that Labouvie-Vief has found among American emerging adults takes place in some other cultures in a way that is less self-focused and more oriented toward duties and obligations to others (Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004).

Identity

One of the key features I have proposed as part of development during emerging adulthood is identity explorations. In interviews with emerging adults, I have found that identity issues arise in response to a wide range of questions, which suggests that these issues are so prominent during this period that they pervade many areas of life.

How does this observation match up with the theory and research that has been done on identity formation? According to James E. Côté in his chapter on identity development in emerging adulthood, it is widely agreed among scholars that important aspects of identity development take place during the emerging adult years. He also notes that participation in higher education has greatly expanded in the past half century in countries such as the United States and Canada, and he interprets this as a sign of the spread of emerging adulthood, as the pursuit of higher education often includes identity explorations with respect to possible future work. However, he emphasizes that for emerging adults who do not obtain higher education after secondary school, their work experiences from their late teens through their 20s may involve frequent job changes, not as part of identity explorations but as part of a frustrating attempt to find an adequate job in a society that no longer offers many satisfying options for people who lack the credentials of higher education.

Côté notes, as I have, that emerging adulthood is a time of considerable freedom from institutional guidance and social control for young people in postindustrial or postmodern societies. However, his interpretation of the consequences of this self-focused freedom is somewhat darker than mine. In Côté's view the freedom of emerging adulthood is favorable for some, and they make

the most of it to pursue "a life course of continual and deliberate growth," a response Côté calls *developmental individualization* (chap. 4, p. 92). But this is only part of the picture. Pursuing developmental individualization requires a substantial amount of what Côté terms *identity capital*, meaning the personal qualities of self-understanding, self-discipline, and planfulness that can be used to guide choices in love and work in the absence of social and institutional supports. Those who lack identity capital are at risk for following a course of default individualization, in which they do not engage in systematic identity explorations but instead drift along through emerging adulthood with no particular direction in mind, diverted from their anomie by the latest distractions of popular culture. Thus Côté usefully calls attention to the heterogeneity that exists among emerging adults with respect to their personal and social resources, and emphasizes the importance of studying the experiences of emerging adults who do not have the benefit of a sufficient amount of education and identity capital to thrive on the lack of structure typical of emerging adulthood.

With respect to identity status research, the amount of light this literature can cast on identity development in emerging adulthood is disappointingly meager. Vast amounts of research have been done on identity development in the emerging adulthood age period, usually with college students, but oddly, most of this research has lacked a developmental perspective. The studies seem to indicate that identity explorations in emerging adulthood are by no means normative but are experienced by only a minority of emerging adults. Still, it would be wise to hesitate before embracing this conclusion wholeheartedly. As Côté notes, the developmental validity of the identity status concept—as well as the measures used to assess it—has been called into question (Côté, 2000; Schacter, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; van Hoof, 1999).

This may be a good example of the importance of paradigms and of the potential value of the emerging adulthood paradigm for inspiring a fresh look at the developmental characteristics of the age period from the late teens through the 20s. Perhaps the assertion that emerging adulthood is distinctive developmentally and that identity explorations are one of the key features of the period will lead to new research to test this hypothesis and new measures to use in the research, informed by theory on emerging adulthood. As Côté notes, the dominant concepts and measurement approaches in identity research were formed some time ago and may not apply as well to emerging adulthood today. The new paradigm of emerging adulthood represents an opportunity to take a fresh look at identity and rethink how it is conceptualized and measured. Côté himself takes a step toward this at the end of his chapter, by presenting a number of promising theoretical ideas and by presenting his recent research. Using a measure he recently developed, he finds some (limited) support for identity development during emerging adulthood. He concedes that this step is preliminary, but hopefully it will lead to further steps. The theoretical model Côté presents should also inspire new research ideas.

Ethnic Identity

Emerging adulthood is not ontogenetic and universal but a consequence of certain cultural and historical conditions (Arnett, 2002), so it is important to

Schulenberg and Zarrett emphasize the great heterogeneity of paths of mental health functioning in emerging adulthood. They attribute this heterogeneity, as I have, to the lack of institutional structure and social support during this age period. Adolescents have the institutional frameworks of living at home and attending secondary school, and most young adults enter the roles of marriage, parenthood, and long-term employment by age 30. In between, during emerging adulthood, the lack of institutional structures means that emerging adults have an exceptional amount of freedom to exercise agency and freedom of choice. These freedoms may underlie their high sense of well-being as a group, as Tanner suggests in her chapter, but those who are most in need of the guidance of institutional structures may exhibit mental health problems for the first time during emerging adulthood.

The appearance of severe psychopathology in emerging adulthood is likely to be due to more than environmental factors. Mental disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder have been shown to have a high genetic loading (Plomin, DeFries, McClearn, & Rutter, 1997), and it may be that such disorders are timed genetically to appear for the first time in the decade or so after puberty is reached. But even if this is true, it may be that the lack of institutional structure in emerging adulthood makes the expression of a genetic vulnerability to mental disorders more likely. Schulenberg and Zarrett emphasize the issue of continuity-discontinuity in mental health from adolescence to emerging adulthood and how it may be related to the transitions and events emerging adults experience. They present four categories of continuity-discontinuity, based on combinations of the descriptive (manifest) level and the explanatory (underlying meaning) level. This approach is a potentially fruitful way of understanding developmental change from adolescence to emerging adulthood and from emerging adulthood to young adulthood, not just in mental health but in other areas as well. For example, as they suggest, the changing meaning of substance use over time can be understood in terms of its functional discontinuity over time—that is, a 14-year-old adolescent who drinks a six-pack of beer every Friday and Saturday night is probably not mentally healthy and likely has a variety of other problems such as family difficulties and school problems. For a 35-year-old, the same behavior may also be a sign of poor mental health, but of a different kind, perhaps loneliness, insecurity, or self-destructiveness. However, an emerging adult who exhibits such behavior at age 21 or 22, at the height of the “prime drinking years” (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002) in American society, may not have any mental health problems at all but be drinking out of positive motivations such as sociability and youthful exuberance. For these emerging adults, binge drinking may be a *developmental disturbance* that recedes after emerging adulthood without predicting or being predicted by enduring difficulties in development.

Throughout their chapter, Schulenberg and Zarrett emphasize the importance of identifying subgroup trajectories from adolescence to emerging adulthood. This approach to analyzing longitudinal data is extremely promising. It takes into account the heterogeneity of development in emerging adulthood because it identifies not just overall patterns but a variety of trajectories that different subsamples of emerging adults may follow. In view of the heterogeneity of emerging adulthood, I believe it would be valuable if this trajectory model

became the standard methodological approach to analyzing longitudinal data that includes emerging adults.

Resilience

I have long considered resilience a promising topic with respect to emerging adulthood, partly because of my experience in interviewing emerging adults who have displayed remarkable resilience, transforming their lives in strikingly positive ways in emerging adulthood after a difficult and tumultuous childhood and adolescence. Their stories are dramatic and moving (see Arnett, 2004, chap. 9). Also, it seems that the social context of emerging adulthood offers especially rich possibilities for resilience. Unlike children and adolescents, emerging adults can leave a destructive, chaotic, or stressful family situation in pursuit of a healthier environment. Unlike older adults, emerging adults are not yet committed to long-term obligations in love and work that may lock them into an unhealthy path. The freedom of emerging adulthood, the self-focused nature of it, and the lack of social constraint seem to offer the possibility of dramatic change for the better. This is one way in which emerging adulthood is the age of possibilities.

Ann S. Masten, Jelena Obradović, and Keith B. Burt pursue this possibility in their chapter on resilience. They begin with the hypothesis that "Emerging adulthood holds particular interest for the study of risk and resilience because this period may afford important changes in functional capacity, vulnerabilities, and opportunities that may play an important role in altering the life course" (chap. 7, p. 177). They note that other longitudinal studies have found that military service, marriage and romantic relationships, higher education, religious affiliations, and work opportunities may provide turning-point opportunities in emerging adulthood. Then they examine this hypothesis using data from their landmark longitudinal study of resilience, Project Competence, which has assessed a sample in childhood, adolescence, emerging adulthood (ages 17–23), and young adulthood (ages 27–33). Looking at development from childhood to emerging adulthood, they found that emerging adults who had experienced high adversity in childhood but displayed competence in adulthood—that is, the resilient group—had resources of intelligence, personality, and family relationships not shared with their maladaptive peers who also experienced high adversity in childhood but were struggling in emerging adulthood. This finding suggests that making use of emerging adulthood as the age of possibilities depends on having the benefit of resources that provide tools for responding successfully to high adversity.

Also of interest are their findings of resilience from emerging adulthood to young adulthood. They found that the resilient group in emerging adulthood continued to function better than did the maladaptive group 10 years later, during young adulthood, in the domains of work and romantic relationships. However, of particular interest in these analyses, with respect to the question of emerging adulthood as the age of possibilities, is their finding of *late-blooming resilience* among a *turnaround group* who changed from maladaptive in emerging adulthood to resilient in young adulthood. Compared with their peers

who remained maladaptive in young adulthood, the emerging adults in this turnaround group had more of what Masten and colleagues called *EA adaptive resources* of planfulness, autonomy, and adult support. But this turnaround group was small, so these findings would be worth exploring further in a larger sample, perhaps in a study focusing specifically on resilience from emerging adulthood to young adulthood.

In their research design, Masten and colleagues adapt their standard of competence to each age period, looking at *emerging domains* that have importance as developmental tasks in a specific age period as well as *core domains* that apply across age periods. They also look at predictors of resilience that are developmentally specific. With respect to emerging adulthood, these EA adaptive resources are future orientation, planfulness, autonomy, adult support, and coping skills. One notable feature of these adaptive resources is that they are largely cognitive; with the exception of adult support, all have a cognitive basis. This finding supports Labouvie-Vief's assertion that important cognitive changes take place in emerging adulthood. Although the focus of Masten and her colleagues is on resilience, their findings have important implications for cognitive development during emerging adulthood.

Also of interest is the finding that the emerging domains of work and romantic relationships in emerging adulthood did not predict future competence in young adulthood. The authors observe that this is "consistent with our developmental task theory, in that these tasks would be considered to be in an exploratory phase during EA" (chap. 7, p. 184). It is also consistent with my assertion that exploration and instability are two of the key developmental features of emerging adulthood. Work and romantic relationships are areas of life that are unsettled in emerging adulthood because of the exploration and instability that characterizes them during these years. As a consequence, an assessment of work and romantic status at any one point during emerging adulthood predicts little about what their lives will be like 10 years later.

The authors close the chapter by stating that although luck certainly plays a role in determining which emerging adults turn out to be resilient, "it would be desirable to rely less on lucky conjunctions and more on thoughtful scaffolding of this transition," through strategic interventions informed by "a better understanding of the processes that influence planful competence, future orientation, motivation to change, successful mentoring, and positive engagement in age-salient developmental tasks" (chap. 7, p. 188). The cognitive features of emerging adulthood that play such an important role in resilience are skills that can be taught. Perhaps future research will provide more information about how these skills might be taught to emerging adults or to adolescents on the verge of emerging adulthood, especially those who have experienced adverse conditions in childhood and adolescence and consequently are especially in need of the opportunity for resilience presented by emerging adulthood.

Family Relationships

Family relationships have long been regarded as the primary influence on children's social and emotional development. The influence of parents on

children and adolescents is clear enough, as parents determine everything from food and clothing to where the family will live to what the rules and customs of the household will be. But what about emerging adults, who are no longer as dependent on their parents as they once were, and may not even live at home any longer? What place do family relationships have in their lives?

William S. Aquilino's chapter provides a great deal of information and insight on this question. He uses the family life-course framework to emphasize "the interdependence of family members' life paths and the constant interplay between individual development and family development." This approach is effective in drawing attention to the ways that changes not only in emerging adults but in their parents influence the relationship. For example, as emerging adults become more capable of self-sufficiency and may begin to serve as a source of support for their parents, parents may learn to recognize and adjust to their children's near-adult maturity and offer them the blessing that implicitly or explicitly encourages it. Changes on both sides allow parents and emerging adults to move toward a relationship that is less hierarchical and more like a friendship, more of a relationship between near-equals.

Aquilino reviews longitudinal studies of parent-child relationships from childhood or adolescence to emerging adulthood and finds some degree of continuity over time, especially from adolescence to emerging adulthood. However, perhaps more striking is that even when the earlier relationships are significant predictors of relationships in emerging adulthood, the effects are not strong, explaining less than 10% of the variance. This finding means that more often than not, the quality of relationships with parents is different in emerging adulthood than it was earlier. The explanation for this may lie in the changes that take place over time in the lives of both parents and emerging adults—for parents, events such as divorce, physical illness, or mental illness; for emerging adults, changes such as leaving home, obtaining full-time work, or attending college. I might add here the kinds of cognitive and identity changes described by Labouvie-Vief and Côté, which also contribute to changes in the parent-child relationship.

One of the most enduring family influences in the lives of emerging adults is a negative one, that is, the influence of parental divorce. As Aquilino describes, considerable evidence indicates that parental divorce has negative effects on relationships with emerging adults, especially between emerging adults and their noncustodial parent, usually the father. In fact, one study indicates that there may be a sleeper effect of divorce, such that the negative effects on children's mental health become more evident in emerging adulthood than they had been previously (Cherlin, Chase-Landsdale, & McRae, 1998). Furthermore, an important study by Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) shows that even when the effects of divorce on emerging adults are not evident in their behavior, the pain of it often remains deep, even many years later. I have seen evidence of this pain often, in my interviews with emerging adults (see Arnett, 2004, chap. 3). However, I would emphasize, as many scholars on divorce have (e.g., Buchanan, 2000), that the effects of divorce are diverse and complex. It is indeed striking how deep and enduring the pain of their parents' divorce remains in the memories of many emerging adults, but parental divorce is experienced by nearly half of American children and individual differences are

vast. For some, their parents' divorce is a welcome relief from constant conflict (Arnett, 2004).

Emerging adults are more capable than children or adolescents of understanding their parents' relationship, including the motivations parents may have for divorcing, and this understanding is part of a larger change. For me, the most striking quality in emerging adults' relationships with their parents is the way emerging adults come to understand their parents as persons, not just as parents (Arnett, 2004). They are much better than children or adolescents at taking their parents' perspective and understanding how life looks from that perspective. This important change in social cognition needs further exploration.

Although Aquilino acknowledges that most of the research available for his chapter is based on mostly White samples in the United States, especially college students, he emphasizes the need for studies that explore cultural variations in emerging adults' relationships with parents. I agree, and it is possible to see in the studies Aquilino reviews how the focus on European Americans has shaped certain assumptions about development in family relationships in emerging adulthood that could be challenged or filled out by research on other cultures. Assumptions are often made about the desirability of independence from parents that are based more on American individualism than on anything that is inherently part of development in emerging adulthood. In many cultures reaching adulthood means not just being able to take care of oneself but being able to take care of others. Research on perceptions of what it means to be an adult shows that European Americans typically emphasize individualistic criteria such as accepting responsibility for oneself and making independent decisions, whereas emerging adults with an Asian cultural background—for example, Asian Americans, South Koreans, and Chinese—emphasize not only these qualities but also commitments to others, especially the capacity for taking care of one's parents (Arnett, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004). As Aquilino notes, persons in minority cultures in the United States also tend to be more likely than European Americans to view it as acceptable for emerging adults to remain in their parents' household.

In addition to the need for more research on cultural variations in family relationships during emerging adulthood, Aquilino identifies several other promising "unanswered (and unasked) questions." The results of research on relationships with siblings and grandparents in emerging adulthood are intriguing, but there is very little of it. Aquilino also calls for research on how emerging adults and their parents talk about the changes occurring in their relationship, a great topic for an interview study. There is also a need for research that examines variations in emerging adults' family relationships by gender, region, socioeconomic status, and combinations of these variables. In short, an abundance of research topics awaits scholars interested in family relationships in emerging adulthood.

Friendships and Romantic Relationships

Entering emerging adulthood means leaving the setting of secondary school and the daily context it provides for peer interactions. One might expect substantial

changes in friendships from adolescence to emerging adulthood because emerging adults are no longer concentrated in a context in which they are likely to see each other every school day; even emerging adults who attend college have a less concentrated, more diffuse peer environment, and of course many emerging adults do not attend college. With respect to romantic relationships one might also expect changes from adolescence to emerging adulthood, as emotional maturity develops and as the first initiation into romantic relationships gives way to more intensive exploration of emotional and sexual intimacy.

W. Andrew Collins and Manfred van Dulmen examine some of these issues in their chapter. They especially focus on the question of whether emerging adulthood can be distinguished from adolescence with respect to close relationships (i.e., friendships and romantic relationships). Their overall conclusion is that emerging adults' close relationships are similar to adolescents' in relationship motives, concerns, and expectations but that emerging adults describe their close relationships in ways that are more differentiated and complex than in adolescence. This difference provides additional support for the theme that there are distinct advances in social cognition from adolescence to emerging adulthood, as Labouvie-Vief and Aquilino described in their chapters.

A provocative finding discussed by Collins and van Dulmen is that relationships are more integrated in emerging adulthood than in adolescence, that is, relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners are more similar in quality and in the representations associated with them, and emerging adults engage in more social interactions that include diverse relationships. I would suggest that this finding might reflect greater identity development in emerging adulthood. As emerging adults develop a more integrated identity, they increasingly show the same self to others in their different relationships, which makes it easier for them to enjoy social events that include friends as well as family members or romantic partners. This may be a hypothesis worth investigating.

Collins and van Dulmen focus many of the analyses from their own data on the question of whether identity explorations in friendships and romantic relationships are a distinctive feature of development in emerging adulthood, as I have proposed. They conclude that their evidence does not generally support my distinctiveness hypothesis for identity explorations in emerging adulthood. However, they test the hypothesis by looking simply at numerical indicators such as time spent with friends and number of romantic and sexual relationships, with higher numbers indicating greater exploration. This strategy is understandable, given that they were looking for variables in their existing database to test new hypotheses about a new theory, rather than designing new measures *a priori*. As a result, it sheds only limited light on the question of the distinctiveness of identity explorations in emerging adulthood.

The number of friendships and romantic relationships may well decline from adolescence through emerging adulthood, as they (and others) have found, but this finding is subject to multiple interpretations. It could indicate a decline in identity explorations from adolescence to emerging adulthood, as Collins and van Dulmen suggest, if it means that changing relationships is a form of identity exploration. However, it could indicate more intensive and systematic identity exploration in emerging adulthood than in adolescence. Adolescents may change relationships frequently because their relationships are less

identity-based; they choose their relationships more on the basis of criteria of companionship and status (Brown, 1999). In contrast, emerging adults may change relationships less frequently because their relationships become more identity-focused; they look more for an identity fit with another person, a deeper and more personalized attachment. In any case, Collins and van Dulmen are forthright about the limitations of existing data, and their analysis sets up a useful framework for designing studies that will allow for the examination of the relation between close relationships and identity development more directly.

Collins and van Dulmen highlight the finding in their research that measures of functioning in adolescence and even childhood significantly predict aspects of close relationships in emerging adulthood. As with the findings reported by Tanner and by Aquilino, I recommend caution in interpreting these findings. A significant finding may in fact account for only a small portion of the variance, so it should not be taken to indicate that there is more continuity than change from childhood to adolescence to emerging adulthood, whether in close relationships or other areas. On the contrary, the broad variance characteristic of emerging adults in most aspects of their lives is likely to be evident here as well, and the rich promise of future research is to examine the diversity of patterns or trajectories that people follow from adolescence to emerging adulthood to young adulthood.

Especially enlightening would be longitudinal studies that follow a sample of people closely from adolescence through emerging adulthood and chart the changes that take place in their close relationships along the way. How do they change in what they look for in friends and romantic partners? How do they meet new ones and develop relationships with them? What sorts of factors precipitate the dissolution of close relationships, and how does such dissolution influence emerging adults?

Sexuality

One part of nearly all romantic relationships among emerging adults is sexuality. A notable feature of emerging adulthood is that it is a time when it is normative for people to be sexually active, including intercourse, outside the context of marriage. This is a new phenomenon, something that never existed before in Western societies prior to the 1960s. Premarital sex has always been strongly prohibited, especially for women, who in the past were disgraced if it became known that they were no longer virgins prior to marriage, and indeed as known nonvirgins their marriage prospects plummeted. The change to widespread tolerance of premarital sex took place because of a number of factors, including the invention of the birth control pill and changes in gender role expectations for women. Now that it is generally acceptable for emerging adults to be sexually active before marriage, new opportunities are available to them as well as a number of persistent problems.

In their chapter, Eva S. Lefkowitz and Meghan M. Gillen examine a variety of aspects of sexuality in emerging adulthood. They describe emerging adults as highly diverse in their sexual behavior. Emerging adults (ages 18–24) are more likely than persons in the next older or next younger age periods to have

had two or more sexual partners in the past year, but they are also more likely than 25- to 29-year-olds to have had sex a few times or not at all in the past year. Here, then, is another example of the heterogeneity of emerging adults, the broad variance in their behavior that is a consequence of their exceptional freedom of choice in combination with the lack of normative expectations for this age period.

Lefkowitz and Gillen emphasize the place of identity issues in the sexuality of emerging adults. A variety of sexual issues underscore the idea of emerging adulthood as the age of identity explorations, including deciding on one's sexual beliefs and attitudes related to premarital sex and contraception, and views of gender in relation to sexuality (e.g., the issue of male-female power in the relationship). The *hooking up* that is normative among American college students can be seen as part of the identity explorations of emerging adulthood, that is, part of obtaining a broad range of experiences before becoming committed to a particular choice. Lefkowitz and Gillen frame identity development and sexuality in emerging adulthood in terms of the development of a sexual self-schema. As they note, development of this self-schema is an especially salient issue in emerging adulthood because this is the time when most people are first incorporating their sexuality into their overall identity.

Another identity-related feature of sexuality in emerging adulthood is that, among persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT), coming out tends to occur right around the time emerging adulthood begins. Perhaps coming out is identity-related in the sense that emerging adulthood is when LGBT persons develop a more definite sense of their sexual identity, after first experiencing same-sex attractions and sexual behavior in adolescence or earlier. The timing of coming out may also be related to the beginning of emerging adulthood because this is when most young people in American society first leave home (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999). Perhaps out of fear that their parents may respond aversively when they come out, LGBT persons may choose to do so only after they are about to leave home or have left home and no longer have to face their parents' dismay and disapproval on a daily basis. But the evidence on this issue is very limited; this is a hypothesis for future investigation.

Lefkowitz and Gillen seek to avoid portraying the sexuality of emerging adults strictly as problematic. As they note, "Responsible sexual behavior between two consenting emerging adults is not necessarily linked with negative psychological or physical consequences" (chap. 10, p. 236). This is a good point; the developmental differences between adolescents and emerging adults, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, make sexual involvements less problematic and potentially more positive for emerging adults. It is unfortunate that the sexual behavior of emerging adults frequently falls short of being responsible. Many of them use contraception inconsistently or use unreliable methods such as withdrawal. Rates of single motherhood, abortion, and STDs are higher in the 20s than in any other age period. Reports of unwanted sexual contact among college women are disturbingly high.

Also disturbing are the high rates of STDs such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and chlamydia among emerging adults. Even though most emerging adults are sexually active and have a series of partners over the course of their

emerging adult years, and many hook up in casual sexual episodes occasionally, few of them ever get tested for STDs. They appear to be unaware that persons with STDs such as HPV and chlamydia are often asymptomatic, and that if they remain undiagnosed and untreated they are at risk for future problems ranging from infertility to cervical cancer. There is a clear and urgent need here to educate emerging adults about the risks of STDs and the importance of regular testing.

In part, the problems associated with sexuality in emerging adulthood are the consequence of being at an age at which most people are sexually active but few are married and partners change fairly frequently. Under these circumstances, it is likely that occasionally mistakes will be made and an unintended pregnancy or an STD will result. Still, it is notable that rates of abortion, single motherhood, and STDs are considerably higher among emerging adults in the United States than in any other industrialized country. This indicates that something about the American approach to sexuality in emerging adulthood, not just sexuality in emerging adulthood per se, is problematic. What makes the problematic consequences of emerging adult sexuality higher in the United States than elsewhere? Is the answer similar to what has been found regarding adolescent sexuality, in studies comparing the United States with other Western countries (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2001), implicating factors such as restricted access to contraception, lack of adequate sex education, and ambivalence about the morality of premarital sex? Or are there other factors specific to emerging adulthood?

These are questions for which answers are urgently needed. In their conclusion, Lefkowitz and Gillen do an excellent job of laying out an agenda for future research on emerging adult sexuality, calling for more qualitative studies, longitudinal studies, studies of couples rather than only individuals, studies that include romantic relationships as well as sexuality, and studies of nonpenetrative sexuality. I hope that many investigators will use their ideas as a road map for new research.

School and Work

Emerging adulthood is a key time for preparing the foundation for the kind of work people will be doing in their adult lives. This foundation is prepared in part through education, as many emerging adults pursue postsecondary schooling intended to provide them with skills that will be useful in the workplace, and in part through workplace experience, usually through a series of jobs rather than one job over time. In their chapter, Stephen F. and Mary Agnes Hamilton illuminate the complexity of the paths in school and work that people follow in the course of emerging adulthood.

The heterogeneity of emerging adulthood is clear with respect to school and work. Their school and work patterns are strikingly diverse, with myriad combinations of full-time or part-time school with full- or part-time work, different types of school (4-year, 2-year, General Educational Development certificate), military service, and so on. The Hamiltons' delineation of this diversity serves as a useful reminder for anyone who is accustomed to thinking

about emerging adults as students at 4-year residential colleges. Such students are not a majority even among college students, as many emerging adults attend 2-year colleges or commute to 4-year schools. Nor is entering a 4-year college any guarantee of obtaining a 4-year degree; barely half of those who enroll in 4-year programs have graduated 5 years later, and only 29% of 25- to 29-year-olds in the United States hold at least a bachelor's degree. There are gaping ethnic differences, with Asian Americans and Whites far more likely than African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans to obtain a bachelor's degree. Almost one fourth of emerging adults do not even graduate from high school on time; of these, about half obtain a GED certificate some time in emerging adulthood.

In addition to diversity, a second hallmark of emerging adults' school and work patterns is instability. The average number of jobs over the first 10 years of employment is seven, and most emerging adults hold their first job for less than a year. Many of the emerging adults who enter higher education after high school drop out before obtaining a degree, perhaps resuming some time later. Others may change from one school-work combination to another, going from full-time to part-time or vice versa in either school or work.

It seems clear that emerging adults' school and work patterns are emblematic of emerging adulthood as the age of instability, as I have called it. But what this instability means in the lives of emerging adults remains an open question. The Hamiltons describe a debate in the employment literature over whether the instability of emerging adults' work patterns indicates *searching* or *floundering*, that is, whether it indicates a search for a job that best matches their interests and abilities or whether it is indicative of lack of planning or direction. They come to the sensible conclusion that instability reflects searching for some and floundering for others. The Hamiltons recommend that scholars "disaggregate the population . . . to distinguish those who are following productive career paths from those who are not, to identify their characteristics, and to compare their relative proportions in the population." This suggestion is consistent with the identification of trajectory subgroups laid out by Schulenberg and Zarrett in their chapter on mental health, which holds promise across a wide range of areas in emerging adulthood.

As the Hamiltons emphasize, it is important not only to distinguish the searchers from the flounders but to understand how they get that way. The usual suspects, such as parental education and income, are certainly involved, but other factors are surely involved as well. The Hamiltons describe a recent study by Osgood et al. (2005) showing that emerging adults from poor families who do well in school and have high educational expectations can do just as well in their educational or occupational attainment in emerging adulthood as those who come from backgrounds with more advantages and resources. In other words, ability and achievement motivation can trump family background. The Hamiltons tie this finding to the resilience literature, and this finding can be seen as an example of emerging adulthood as a critical period for the expression of resilience, as described by Masten and her colleagues in their chapter.

It may not be as simple as distinguishing the searchers from the flounders. So far, floundering has been determined simply by a pattern of frequent

movement between jobs and into and out of the labor force. But what if this does not feel like floundering to those who are experiencing it? Surely there is an important distinction between emerging adults who change jobs frequently and feel frustrated and despondent that they are unable to keep a job for long, as contrasted with those who move from job to job in emerging adulthood and do not mind or even enjoy the changes, perhaps because they view this as a time of life when their focus is on leisure and work is simply a necessary evil, a way to pay the bills to allow them to enjoy life outside of work. Interview research is necessary to learn more about how emerging adults experience their frequent job changes.

One thing that seems clear on the basis of what is already known is that a lot more could and should be done for emerging adults in the United States to assist them in planning a career path. As it currently stands, virtually all emerging adults have high expectations for the kind of employment they will eventually find—a testament to emerging adulthood as the age of possibilities, when optimism reigns—but relatively few of them have a clear understanding of how to develop a systematic plan to turn their hopes into reality. Instead, they hope that by falling into one job after another, they will eventually fall into one they like and want to stay in. There is no institutional school-to-work program in the United States, and consequently emerging adults must rely on what Côté calls *identity capital*: qualities such as initiative, purposefulness, and agency. But those who lack a sufficient amount of these qualities face an unpromising occupational future.

The Hamiltons offer a number of excellent suggestions to rectify this problem and move toward more structured explorations in emerging adulthood. Secondary schools and colleges can provide assistance in constructing a career plan through academic counseling and by linking their curricula to occupations. These approaches have been demonstrated to be effective. The Hamiltons also recommend work-based learning, including active mentoring, whose effectiveness has been shown through decades of their own exemplary research. Perhaps their most original and promising suggestion is to integrate research on career paths with research on resilience: “The basic idea is applying to emerging adults the same approach used in studying resilient children: trying to understand how some succeed in overcoming the odds against them” (chap. 11, p. 274). This exciting, innovative idea will hopefully inspire a great deal of new theory and research.

Media

For a variety of reasons, one might expect media to play a prominent role in the lives of emerging adults. Emerging adults spend more of their leisure time alone than do any other age group except the elderly (Larson, 1990), and one might expect that they often use media as a companion during that time alone. Emerging adults’ social activities, too, often involve media; recorded music serves as a soundtrack to much of the peer social interactions of adolescents, and no doubt the same is true for emerging adults. Most emerging adults move

out of their parents' household, which means they have considerably more freedom than children or adolescents to make media choices without restrictions, monitoring, or criticism from their parents. Also, today's emerging adults are what Jane D. Brown calls "the new media generation," meaning that they are the first generation to have grown up with new media that are "more accessible, more interactive, and more under their control than any other known before" (chap. 12, p. 279) such as the Internet, virtual games, and virtual friends (e.g., in Internet chat rooms).

Despite the evident importance of media in the lives of emerging adults, there is surprisingly little research on their media use. Even the ubiquitous studies on college students typically have not looked at their media use developmentally. Brown's chapter in this volume provides a valuable foundation for media research on emerging adults, as she uses the existing research on children, adolescents, and college students to generate numerous research questions on emerging adulthood.

As a framework for the chapter, she uses the media practice model that she and her colleagues have developed from their research on media uses among adolescents. This elegant model goes beyond simple assumptions of cause and effect to place media in the context of the rest of life. It recognizes that people make choices about the media content they consume, and that they are not simply the passive recipients of media but active processors who may use media for a variety of purposes, depending on characteristics they bring to it. In the course of the chapter, Brown shows that the model applies at least as well to emerging adults as it does to adolescents.

For Brown, identity is the driving force behind selection of media choices: "The media may be seen as virtual tool kits of possibilities for most of the dimensions of identity work, including work, love, and ideology" (chap. 12, p. 281). She makes a compelling distinction between "two kinds of media identification: identification by the kinds of media attended to and identification with different media characters" (chap. 12, p. 282). One might think emerging adults are beyond the age of identifying with media characters, that this is something for children and adolescents, but Brown describes a study showing that 70% of Canadian college students had a celebrity idol who had influenced their attitudes and values (Boon & Lomore, 2001). This is a good example of how research on emerging adults' media uses may be surprising and will certainly explain more not only about the role of media in their lives but about other aspects of their development as well.

Selection is a particularly interesting aspect of Brown's model, with respect to emerging adults. She aptly notes that emerging adults have "a huge array of media choices" and that what they pick from among that huge array will depend on their own identities and needs. So what do they pick? How do they divide their media time between television, music, computer games, the Internet, and other media, and what is the range of their selections within each of these media? Studies in recent years have provided excellent data on children and adolescents with respect to these questions (e.g., Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 2000), but so far for emerging adults there are only isolated data here and there, such as the surprising finding that emerging adult males

are enthusiastic users of violent video games. There is a clear need for a comprehensive study that will provide definitive evidence on the frequencies of media use among emerging adults.

One difference among emerging adults that may be important in their media use is between those who are involved in a romantic relationship and those who are not. I suspect that media use in emerging adulthood is especially high among those who are not in a romantic relationship, because they are likely to have more time alone that invites media use to fend off loneliness. Furthermore, it may be that certain kinds of media use are more common among emerging adults who are not currently romantically involved with someone. Internet pornography could be predicted to be especially popular among emerging adults who are currently without a partner. Also, Internet dating services may be popular among emerging adults, especially those who do not have the college environment, to provide a setting where they are likely to meet unattached people of a similar age. These are examples of the kinds of questions that are generated by thinking of media use in emerging adulthood in developmental terms, thinking about how it may be related to the rest of their lives, and reminding oneself of the heterogeneity that is likely to exist here among emerging adults, as elsewhere.

In the section entitled *Interaction: What does it mean?* Brown notes that "All emerging adults will not interpret the same media content in the same way. Young people come to the media with different backgrounds, motives, and identifications, and these will influence what sense they make of what is heard or seen" (chap. 12, p. 287). I would add that the cognitive abilities of emerging adults may make their interactions with media different from what they may be for children or adolescents. I can see the potential for a fruitful integration of what Brown describes here with the insights on emerging adults' cognitive development presented by Labouvie-Vief in her chapter. Given what Labouvie-Vief describes, that cognitive development in emerging adulthood makes possible greater abilities for understanding complexity and multiple perspectives, one might expect that emerging adults would be less easily influenced by media than children and adolescents are and more capable of recognizing and defusing media's manipulative power. But whether this is actually true awaits empirical investigation.

In her section on the portion of her model describing application of media uses, Brown herself raises a number of provocative questions about potential influences of media in emerging adulthood, on topics such as aggression, body image, occupational choice, and political ideology. There is, in that short section, enough of an agenda on media uses in emerging adulthood to keep legions of scholars busy for years to come. So, although the current lack of research information on media uses in emerging adulthood is frustrating, the vistas for research opened up by Brown's ideas offer great promise for the future in this area. Media research on children and adolescents has overwhelmingly focused on the possibility of negative effects. I hope that future research on media in emerging adulthood will explore not only the potentially negative influences of media but also its positive potential as a source of information, social interaction, and enjoyment.

Two Research Issues

Each of the chapters of the book presented ideas for new research on emerging adulthood, and together they lay out a research agenda that will provide challenges for many years to come. In this final section of the chapter and of the book, I wish to draw attention to two additional research issues: the potential of research on emerging adulthood around the world and the fruitfulness of using qualitative methods.

Emerging Adulthood Worldwide

One limitation of this book is that it focuses exclusively on emerging adulthood in the United States. All the contributors are American except for one Canadian (James E. Côté), and virtually all the studies on which the chapters are based were conducted on American samples. I have proposed that emerging adulthood is an international phenomenon, and the American focus of this book goes against the grain of my own cultural and international approach to theory and research (e.g., Arnett, 2002). However, there were practical reasons for it. As Americans, emerging adulthood in the United States is what we, the authors of this book, know best. This book is the first attempt to draw together research and theoretical ideas on emerging adulthood in a wide range of areas, so understandably we started with what we know best and what we can speak about with the most authority.

However, as the study of emerging adulthood grows, it can and should become an international enterprise in the course of the 21st century. All other developed countries have experienced the same demographic changes as I described in chapter 1 (this volume) for the United States, that is, rising median ages of marriage and parenthood and widening participation in higher education (Bynner, in press; Chisholm & Hurrelmann, 1995; Douglass, 2004). These changes are the demographic preconditions for a period of emerging adulthood, particularly a median age of marriage and parenthood in at least the late 20s, as these changes open up an emerging adulthood age period from roughly 18 to 25 that is beyond adolescence but prior to the attainment of full (even young) adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

Considerable research on this age period has taken place in Europe for decades, under the term *youth studies*. However, youth studies span an age range from the mid-teens through the mid-20s and thus fail to make what I believe to be a useful distinction between adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Bynner, in press). Also, youth studies are primarily sociological and focus mainly on transition events and socioeconomic issues, especially the transition from school to work. Applying the emerging adulthood paradigm in European countries may open up new horizons of research in the kinds of areas addressed in this book—identity issues, cognitive development, mental health, resilience, family relationships, romantic relationships, media use, and more.

This does not mean that emerging adulthood in Europe will be found to be similar to how it appears to be in the United States. For example, I do not know whether the five features of emerging adulthood I have proposed would

turn up in Europe as well, as they are based on my research with Americans. However, thinking of the period between the end of secondary school (in adolescence) and the entry into adult roles (in young adulthood) as a separate period of emerging adulthood leads to an exploration of what is going on developmentally in this period in a wide range of different areas. Although sociological research in Europe on youth studies has yielded important and interesting findings, the nature of psychological development among Europeans during emerging adulthood is little explored so far and offers great promise for research.

With respect to other economically developed countries, even less is known about psychological development during the emerging adulthood age period. Japan, for example, has a median female marriage age of 27, even higher than in most Western countries (Population Reference Bureau, 2000), yet few studies have been conducted that can cast light on what is occurring in their lives between the time they leave secondary school and the time they enter marriage. Does the tradition of family obligation in Japan and other Asian countries mean that emerging adulthood has a much different psychological character there than it does in the West—that is, much less individualized—or has the impact of globalization made the Asian experience of emerging adulthood similar to the Western experience in many ways? This is the kind of compelling question that awaits researchers who wish to study emerging adulthood in economically developed countries outside the West.

With respect to developing countries, the nature of emerging adulthood is likely to be quite different than in either the West or in non-Western developed countries. In most developing countries, the majority of the people are relatively poor, receive only limited education, and enter adult work, marriage, and parenthood in their late teens or very early 20s (Brown, Larson, & Saraswathi, 2002). The majority of young people in such countries do not experience emerging adulthood. However, these countries also have an urban middle class whose young people experience an emerging adulthood that appears to be similar to that experienced by young people in developed countries, at least outwardly, with widespread entry into higher education and a median age of marriage and parenthood in at least the late 20s.

In India, for example, the majority of young people live in low-income rural families, but in the urban areas there is a thriving middle class whose young people have given India a growing reputation for excellence in information technology (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). It cannot yet be said what the lives of these young people are like or how their experience of emerging adulthood is similar to or different from young people in developed countries, but this is certainly a compelling opportunity for research. Indeed, the changes in developing countries in the decades to come may represent a rare opportunity for researchers to chart the birth of a normative period of emerging adulthood, if researchers are foresighted enough to grasp the opportunity. In the course of the 21st century, if more of the world becomes economically developed, the proportion of the world that includes a period of emerging adulthood as part of coming of age is likely to grow steadily.

The studies conducted so far on emerging adulthood outside of North America offer provocative suggestions of what may be learned from studying

emerging adulthood around the world. In Israel, the requirement of 3-year military service beginning at age 18 looms large in the lives of emerging adults, influencing everything from their attachment relationships to their emotional maturity to their views of what it means to be an adult (Mayseless, 2004; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003). In Argentina, the criteria for adulthood most valued by emerging adults reflect the mixed cultural traditions of the country as Western, urbanized, and industrialized but also Latin and Catholic. So, emerging adults widely support individualistic criteria such as accepting responsibility for one's actions and making independent decisions alongside collectivistic criteria such as making lifelong commitments to others and becoming capable of supporting one's parents financially (Facio & Micocci, 2003). Among university students in China, the criteria for adulthood they endorse most widely are a mix of criteria that reflect Chinese tradition, such as becoming capable of supporting one's parents financially, and criteria that may reflect China's growing individualism in response to globalization, such as making independent decisions (Nelson et al., 2004). These studies are suggestive of the promise of new findings that will result from studies on emerging adulthood around the world and how these studies will expand the field's understanding of the variations that take place in the development of emerging adults.

The Importance of Qualitative Methods

Because emerging adulthood is a new field of scholarship, it represents not only a new way to think about the years from the late teens through the 20s but also a chance to reexamine the methods used in research. It should not be assumed that the methods and measures used in research on adolescents should simply be transferred to emerging adults. Rather, one should think about how the characteristics of emerging adulthood might shape how the methods for studying it are devised. One of the issues to consider is the use of qualitative methods.

I am a strong proponent of qualitative methods (see Arnett, 2005) because I have used both qualitative and quantitative methods in my research on emerging adults and I have always learned more from the qualitative methods, especially structured interviews. Quantitative methods (typically questionnaires) can also be useful, and it can be especially powerful to combine qualitative and quantitative methods, as I have done. However, in research on emerging adulthood as in research on other age periods, the current balance is heavily in favor of quantitative methods, and I believe that this (im)balance is not the best way to promote knowledge of this age period.

There are several good reasons for elevating qualitative methods in the study of emerging adults. First, qualitative methods are especially valuable when studying an area in which little is known, to allow for unexpected responses (Briggs, 1989). Questionnaires typically have prestructured response options, which assumes that the researcher already knows the responses that are most likely. However, in studying emerging adults this assumption may not be warranted, because not enough is known about them in most areas to

structure their possible responses. It would be a big mistake simply to take the measures used on adolescents and give them to emerging adults, because emerging adults are not adolescents and different developmental issues may apply. For example, questionnaires on relationships with parents for adolescents typically include items related to parental control that may not be appropriate for emerging adults.

Conducting interviews not only provides useful qualitative data but can lead to the development of questionnaires for emerging adults that may be more appropriate than questionnaires developed for adolescents and may more accurately cover the range of likely responses from emerging adults. I can provide an example of this from my own research. I began my studies on emerging adulthood by looking at the criteria they valued most in their conception of what it means to be an adult. I developed a draft questionnaire that was based on the available literature on this topic, drawn mainly from studies of adolescents. However, as I began to interview emerging adults, I quickly discovered that the questionnaire lacked the criterion that was mentioned most often in the interviews: accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. I added this item to the questionnaire, and it has been the most widely endorsed criterion for adulthood ever since in many studies conducted by myself and others (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2004; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004).

Qualitative interviews with emerging adults are valuable not just as a means to the end of more valid questionnaires but also in their own right. As the chapters in this volume have shown, one of the most striking characteristics of emerging adults is their capacity for social or self-cognition, that is, their insightfulness into the lives and behavior of themselves and others. This capacity is difficult to examine with a questionnaire but is abundantly evident in interviews. Whether they are talking about their relationships with parents, their sexuality, their hopes for the future, or any number of other topics, emerging adults are remarkably articulate and insightful. I am not referring just to the college students and the college graduates. As someone who has spent most of his life in middle-class suburbs, I have learned a lot more about emerging adulthood from interviewing people from the urban and rural working class than I have from interviewing people who grew up as I did. Perhaps because emerging adulthood is the self-focused age, when people spend more time alone and are intently focused on issues such as what to do with their lives, emerging adults tend to be self-reflective no matter what their backgrounds.

Furthermore, interviews provide a vivid understanding of the variance that exists among emerging adults. In psychological research, the tendency is to focus on the mean or median and examine how it compares between groups or in one group over time. Always, this focus obscures the variance that exists around the center, but this masking is especially unfortunate where emerging adults are concerned, because they are so diverse. Little is normative during emerging adulthood, so there is a great deal of variation among them in many characteristics, such as their school and work trajectories, their romantic and sexual involvements, and their identity development. Because interviews involve a human encounter, they are more vivid and memorable than mere

numbers, so an investigator who has done the interviews is likely to be able to call to mind many exceptions and counterexamples when examining mean characteristics.

Of course, qualitative interviews also require much more work to analyze than do questionnaires. I am well aware of that challenge, having spent several years turning more than 300 1- to 2-hour interviews with emerging adults into a book (Arnett, 2004). Nevertheless, I think this work is necessary in the course of seeking a full understanding of the lives of emerging adults. It pays off, in terms of the satisfaction of knowing the whole person as an individual, as well as in the enjoyment of listening to their wit, insight, and emotional expressions, their everyday eloquence.

Conclusion: An End and a Beginning

This book has brought together a wealth of knowledge about the age period that comprises emerging adulthood. I hope that this volume shows the usefulness of conceptualizing emerging adulthood as a separate period of life, different in important ways from the adolescence that precedes it or the young adulthood that follows it. Bringing together research in diverse areas under the emerging adulthood framework shows that more is known about this age period than may have been realized when the research was spread out under diverse terms and without a unifying paradigm.

Nevertheless, far more remains to be known than is known today, as the authors of the chapters have demonstrated with the many provocative questions they have raised. This situation presents those who are interested in the study of this age period with an enticing prospect, the promise of many mountains to climb, each with its own discoveries (and perhaps surprises) at the top, each revealing vistas of many more mountains ahead. The end of this book also marks a beginning, as we in this new field set forth to chart the landscape of this fascinating and eventful age period, and move toward a greater understanding of what it is like to come of age in the 21st century.

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