Your Journey Through Psychosocial Development Continues Long After Graduation

We have not passed that subtle line between childhood and adulthood until we move from the passive voice to the active voice—that is, until we have stopped saying "It got lost," and say "I lost it."

—Sydney J. Harris (1917–1986), newspaper journalist

We continue the journey of inner exploration in this chapter because when you graduate you are still a developmental work in progress. Your bachelor's degree does not signify the end of your intellectual, social, moral, and emotional development but, rather, one major milestone in a lifelong process of change. In short, you are still in the process of "becoming." For every graduate, there is a story of "becoming"—becoming a professional and becoming more mature in one's personal relationships, as you will see in Chapter 11, "Your Personal Life Changes After College."

As one example of becoming a professional, consider Angela. She graduated with a double major in psychology and business and accepted a job as a recruiter in a human resources/staffing firm (a typical job for a psychology/business major). One year into her new career, she felt her personal growth was being stunted and felt trapped in a small field of corporate America, reporting to people she did not always appreciate. Instead of remaining unhappy, she resigned (an option she was

fortunate to have) and enrolled in additional business classes. After a year, she realized she needed something that nurtured her entrepreneurial spirit. Not only did Angela not abandon what she learned in her previous job, but she took the business knowledge, discipline, and communications skills she had learned there and ventured out on her own. She settled comfortably into an independent sales position for an investment firm. Angela never stopped growing and learning; she took her experience and built on it. Today, she is a confident, successful businesswoman who continues to advance in her career. Looking back, Angela's graduation from college was an important milestone, but so was her first job, where she learned a lot and subsequently left when she could learn no more; they were but two critical milestones in a continuing and successful journey in life (J. Keil, personal communication, September 20, 2011).

The extent to which you actively become the *agent* of your continuing change will guide your decisions, values, and actions for decades to follow. So who are you becoming? In this chapter, we explore some familiar and relatively new perspectives on psychosocial development from adolescence into adulthood. As we move from topic to topic, ask yourself, "How does this information inform my own process of becoming?"

Erikson's Fifth and Sixth Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson (1982) identified eight stages of human development. At each stage, "changes within the individual and within the individual's social world combine to create a central conflict that defines the stage. The conflict must be addressed, though not necessarily resolved, within the given stages, says Erikson, before the individual can move to the next stage" (McAdams, 2009, p. 350).

In Erikson's fifth stage, adolescence and young adulthood, the conflict is between identity and role confusion. Identity is first confronted in adolescence because of physical and hormonal changes in the body, the introduction of formal operations in cognitive development, and societal expectations that occupational, ideological, and interpersonal dimensions of an individual's identity be explored and established (McAdams, 2009). The forces within and outside (family, community) the individual that promote identity development usually create tension. "The adolescent or adult should be neither victim nor master of his or her sociohistorical environment. Rather, the relationship between the self and society in the development of healthy identity is best characterized as one of dynamic tension" (p. 357).

An Identity Status Theory

The dynamic tension that powers the engine of identity development in its occupational, ideological, and interpersonal aspects is most obvious in an individual's choices in and progress through postsecondary education, if that option is accessible. Pursuing Erikson's belief that occupation and ideology (fundamental beliefs, especially as they relate to religion and politics) are at the core of identity, James Marcia and associates (as cited in McAdams, 2009) classified young persons on the

basis of structured interviews into four identity statuses that represent particular developmental positions held by an individual: *identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure,* and *identity diffusion.* The identity statuses are best understood through the interacting dimensions of *identity exploration* and *identity commitment.*

Identity Achievement: Exploring Identity and Commitment

Young adults who actively explore their career and values decisions *and* make commitments to a thoughtfully developed occupation and ideology have reached identity achievement, the most advanced of the statuses. Identity achievers internalize their goals, rely on their own abilities to meet challenges, make decisions in an autonomous and principled way, tend not to conform to peer pressure, base their moral decisions on abstract principles rather than popular convention, and are more academically inclined than persons in other statuses. In short, they know who they are and are viewed as mature individuals (McAdams, 2009).

Moratorium: Exploring Identity but Not Yet Committed

Young adults in moratorium status are currently exploring the questions of work and values but have not yet made commitments. They know they do not know who they are, but they are asking the necessary questions. Still, persons in moratorium share many characteristics with identity achievers, and Marcia views them as relatively mature individuals. Compared with those in foreclosure or identity diffusion, individuals in identity achievement and moratorium tend to create richer and more individuated conceptions of themselves, adopt an engaged and exploratory style in processing information, and employ mature defense mechanisms to cope with stress. Some young adults in moratorium, however, display *ambivalence* in their relationships with parents and other authority figures by creating a psychological distance from them and rejecting old values and forms of identification that reflect negative identities (McAdams, 2009). This ambivalence can lead to conflict in situations when new graduates are forced to relinquish their independence and move back home for economic reasons.

Foreclosure: Not Exploring Identity but Committed

Individuals in the foreclosure identity status are failing to meet the challenge of Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development because they have committed to a particular career and set of values without first exploring them. Perhaps they are yielding to the pressures of a parent who has specific career expectations—such as the freshman who confidently announced she was bound for law school because it fulfilled her family's expectations for a third generation of attorneys, yet had neither explored her interests in law nor performed even basic tasks in the family law office and was placed on academic probation after her first semester due to poor grades. Some graduate schools documented a rapid increase in applications for forensic psychology programs soon after television programs such as *CSI* appeared, in spite of the vast differences between the television series' portrayal of forensic operations and real-life situations.

Because foreclosures are conforming to outside authorities or models, they appear to be the "best behaved" of the four statuses. They tend to study hard, keep regular hours, seem happy, and express conventional values derived from family, church, or other authorities (McAdams, 2009). In short, the challenges of college may be quite manageable for foreclosures, given that many decisions about occupation, relationships, and life values have already been made without prior questioning. Some counselors maintain, however, that foreclosed students are ripe for a midlife crisis when events cause them to question earlier career decisions.

In some ways, colleges inadvertently promote the foreclosure status with recruitment procedures that implicitly reward high school applicants who uncritically express clear choices for a particular academic major and encounter advising procedures that do not promote wise exploration of that major's career options. The student who chooses to major in psychology to "help people" may question that decision when confronted by courses in statistics and research methodology, unless that student is also exposed to career options where quantitative coursework is essential. The new psychology major should ask: "Is coursework alone sufficient to help me properly explore my interest in helping people? What else should I be doing to reach identity achievement in its occupational and ideological dimensions?" Our answer: Begin by reviewing the options we described in Chapter 3.

Identity Diffusion: Neither Exploring Identity nor Committed

Identity diffusions, on the other hand, have neither searched for answers to questions about occupation and ideology (or are overwhelmed by the numerous options) nor made any commitments. Like those in the foreclosure status, they fail to resolve the challenge of identity development and instead are awash in role confusion. Often characterized as withdrawn, identity diffusions tend to feel out of place and isolated, distant from parents, and cautious in new relationships, and they "appear afloat in a sea of ambiguity" (McAdams, 2009, p. 360).

When the economy "goes south" and jobs are hard to find, pressures increase on young people to find their identity and a satisfying career—not only a career that satisfies their personal values and goals but also one that will speed the payment of their college loans and lead to financial independence. Consequently, it is crucial that you participate in the numerous opportunities college offers (see Chapter 3) and actively explore your career options (see Chapters 2 and 4).

Marcia's work has been criticized because the four identity statuses may not operate in a developmental sequence. Many studies that support the statuses appear to be more concerned with classification issues than with developmental issues. In addition, some researchers maintain that conscious exploration often does not occur in identity achievement (Cote, 2006). Still, the Marcia *framework* is helpful for understanding the journey toward identity for many young people.

In Erikson's sixth stage of young adulthood, the major developmental challenge is the achievement of intimacy over isolation. The relation between the fifth stage (adolescence and young adulthood) and the sixth is complex. Although Erikson believes a person must make substantial progress in establishing identity development before he or she can become truly intimate with another person, many

people define their identity (Stage 5) through intimate relationships (Stage 6)—for example, "I am the loving partner of Chris."

Given the changes in contemporary society regarding relationships, sexuality, education, and mobility (discussed in the following section), the distinctiveness between these two stages may no longer hold. Complicating this developmental challenge is today's economy, where many young college graduates must delay the establishment of intimate relationships until they have acquired some degree of security in their careers and financial independence.

Time Out: Exercise

Before we explore another perspective on the person you are becoming, take a few minutes to digest and apply our summary of Erikson's and Marcia's concepts as they apply to your development.

1. What specific actions have you followed in the past 9 to 12 months that represent real steps toward exploring your career/vocational interests? How would you grade yourself in these efforts? What are your next steps?

2. The other aspect in Marcia's notion of identity development includes exploration of basic values regarding religious and political beliefs. What specific activities have you carried out during the same period that reflect your exploration in these areas? Grade yourself in this overall effort. What are your next steps?

3. What are the elements that define intimacy for you, and to what extent are you on the path to achieving intimacy in relationships? Do you view the process of achieving intimacy as a major path to identity or achieving identity as a major path to intimacy, or do they interact in some way?

Arnett's Emerging Adulthood

Marcia's research provides a framework for describing possible connections between exploration, commitment, and career choices, but it may not speak to the current social context in which many contemporary young people mature. Erikson's major contributions were in place before the 1970s. Prior to the 1980s, American society expected a young person to have completed his or her education, become financially independent through full-time work, established a family, and purchased a house, usually by his or her mid-20s.

The world has changed in numerous ways during the past 40 to 50 years, and some of these changes have influenced psychosocial development. Using the data from his qualitative studies of 300 young people ages 18 to 29 in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and rural Missouri, Jeffrey Arnett (2004) argued that the period between 18 and 25 in contemporary industrialized countries is neither adolescence nor adulthood (as in Erikson's view) but *emerging adulthood*.

The period of emerging adulthood has arisen due to demographic changes in industrialized countries, changes such as the accessibility of education for a larger number of people (especially women), a growing middle class able to afford higher education and higher standards of living, and delays in entering stable relationships.

In his earlier studies, Arnett identified five features of emerging adulthood that differentiate this stage from Erikson's framework (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). As you read about the features, try to reflect on the extent to which each contributes to your development.

Age of Identity Exploration

Emerging adulthood is the age of identity exploration in the sense that it is the period when people are most likely to be exploring various possibilities for their lives in a variety of areas, especially love and work, as a prelude to making the enduring choices that will set the foundations for their adult lives (Arnett & Tanner, 2006, p. 8).

In your parents' time, it was typical to complete high school or college in 4 years, get a job in an organization where they would likely remain (for 10, 20, or 30 years), get married, have children, and settle down for life. As you know, the times have changed, and students now have far more options to choose from. By age 25, about 70% of emerging adults have obtained at least some college or university education (Arnett, 2004). More than 45% of today's undergraduates are over 21, compared with 25% of undergraduates 30 years ago. In addition, the median time required to complete the baccalaureate has risen from 4 to 5 years; the proportion of students finishing in 6 years has risen from 15% to 23% (Fitzpatrick & Turner, 2006).

Although identity exploration characterizes the search of many emerging adults, Arnett (2004) maintains that there are many others in their late teens and early 20s who move during college from major to major and subsequently from job to job, often unsystematically, searching for what best fits their identity—in other words, they meander. "*Meandering* might be a more accurate word, or maybe *drifting* or even *floundering.* For many emerging adults working simply means finding a job, often a McJob, that will pay the bills until something better comes along" (Arnett, 2004, p. 150).

According to Levit (2009), the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that the typical American holds about nine jobs between the ages of 18 and 32. Other studies may show variations in the number of jobs held during this time span, but findings are not very dissimilar. In addition, "the median length of time workers stay on the job has shrunk by half since 1983—from 2.2 years to 1.1 years now" (p. 18). Further support of these results comes from Farber (2006), who analyzed changes in long-term employment and concluded that *churn* (a series of jobs lasting less than a year) is to be expected in an industrialized society where new employees, even those in their 30s, are searching for the right person–job fit.

In short, in their search for identity, emerging adults take a longer time to settle down and change jobs more often than did young people in previous decades.

When rewarding jobs are hard to find during economic crises, the search for self-identity is further exacerbated. These findings help explain the second characteristic of emerging adulthood, instability (Hettich, 2009).

Age of Instability

By instability, Arnett (2004) is referring to changing residences—for example, from home to residence hall to apartment and perhaps back home again, or from home to living independently, or from home to military or volunteer service. The rates at which people change residences are highest in the 20-to-29 age group, and they peak in the 20-to-24 range, with about 35% of that age group changing residences each year. Such moves are in part a response to identity exploration in work-related changes as well as relationship changes (e.g., cohabitation and/or marriage; Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

The Self-Focused Age

Emerging adults are self-focused to the extent that they leave the structures of home and have relatively few social obligations, duties, and commitments to others. Most have only themselves to worry about, but Arnett and Tanner (2006) maintain that this form of self-focus is not equivalent to self-centeredness. The self-focused age permits a person to concentrate on goals such as achieving self-sufficiency and career stability while simultaneously pursuing the fun and freedom of being an emerging adult before making commitments to a relationship (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

The Age of Feeling in Between

Arnett (2004) chose the term *emerging adulthood* in part because many late teens and persons in their early 20s describe themselves with these words. Participants in Arnett's early study were asked: "Do you feel you have reached adulthood? Yes, no, or yes and no?" Of those between 18 and 25, about 40% responded "yes" and 5% "no." However, about 55% responded "in some ways, yes; in some ways, no." In comparison, more than 60% of those between 26 and 35 years old responded "yes," about 3% "no," and more than 35% "yes and no" to the same question. What are the criteria emerging adults use for defining adulthood? They do not define it with clearly marked transition events such as college graduation or getting married. Instead, they choose benchmarks that are gradually achieved: accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett & Tanner, 2006).

These findings overlap to some degree with a survey of nearly 1,400 Americans 18+ years old who made up the 2002 General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. Participants were asked about the importance

of attaining certain traditional benchmarks of reaching adulthood. The results revealed that "more than 95% of Americans consider the most important markers of adulthood to be completing school, establishing an independent household, and being employed full time—concrete steps associated with the ability to support a family" (Settersten & Ray, 2010, p. 22). In contrast, about half the sample regarded marriage and having children as necessary to be judged an adult. Nowadays, young people view marriage and parenthood primarily as life choices rather than requirements for adulthood (Settersten & Ray, 2010).

The Age of Possibilities

Two phenomena characterize 18 to 25 as the age of possibilities: great optimism and the opportunity to redirect their lives. Emerging adults have high expectations, optimism, and hope for the future because these beliefs and feelings have been strongly reinforced throughout their education by family, teachers, outside institutions, and themselves. Yet, for most emerging adults, these beliefs have not been tested by the realities of life and the workplace. "Before people settle into a long-term job, it is possible for them to believe they are going to find a job that is both well-paying and personally fulfilling, an expression of their identity rather than simply a way to make a living" (Arnett & Tanner, 2006, p. 13). Unfortunately, many college students develop and express unrealistically high expectations about their value in the workplace and are subsequently labeled by supervisors and coworkers as "entitled." Frustrations that result from unrealistically high expectations are exacerbated during periods of high unemployment, when college graduates must often settle for mundane jobs that do not require a college degree or become unemployed while still trying to repay loans.

Sometimes high expectations derive from parents, especially if there is a family tradition in a particular profession. The parents of Su Ling, an exchange student from Asia, had high expectations that she pursue a research career similar to her father's in the pharmaceutical field. Su Ling was fortunate to obtain two internships in a pharmaceutical company and was successful in them, but she felt something was missing. After careful thought and exploration of what she really wanted to do, Su Ling concluded she wanted a career with more direct human contact. She applied to and completed medical school. Given the similarities in rigor, reliance on research, and focus on health, it is unlikely her parents were disappointed in Su Ling's choice; Su Ling is very pleased with her career decision.

Emerging adulthood is also the age of possibilities for those who wish to transform their lives (especially if they experienced difficult family or living conditions) before making commitments to intimate relations and jobs that structure their adult life. "Regardless of their family background, all emerging adults carry their family influences with them when they leave home, which limits the extent to which they can change what they have become by the end of adolescence. Nevertheless, more than any other period of life, emerging adulthood presents the possibility of change" (Arnett & Tanner, 2006, p. 14). During this time, fulfillment of all hopes seems possible because the range of choices for how to live is greater than it has ever been before and will ever be again (Arnett & Tanner, 2006, p. 14).

What Are the Implications of Emerging Adulthood for Your Workplace Preparation?

We believe the characteristics of emerging adulthood provide a solid conceptual basis for the opportunities we recommended in Chapter 3. Part-time jobs, internships, workplace-related courses, extracurricular and volunteer activities, study abroad, military service, and using your college's counseling services can become important venues for self-exploration of personal values, career interests, and relationships. In addition, these opportunities enable you to establish short- and long-term goals, and extracurricular and volunteer activities may add fun to your life (self-focused age). Jobs, internships, leadership positions, and military service—as well as movement to different residences—may speed your progress to adulthood (feeling in between) when they strengthen your decision-making skills, enable you to accept more responsibilities, and provide income. Finally, several opportunities help you establish realistic expectations about the workplace and achieve possibilities you may never have dreamed of—for example, the fabulous internship that confirmed your interest and skills for graduate school; the semester abroad that strengthened your maturity and worldview; the career counseling, coursework, and leadership experiences that helped land an excellent full-time job; or the military service that tested your ability to endure incredible hardships.

What Are Additional Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood?

As research on emerging adulthood has advanced Arnett and his colleague Jennifer Tanner have identified additional features that argue for the distinctiveness of emerging adulthood, but in response to their critics, they have refined the meaning of distinctiveness. *Distinctive* means the characteristic is more likely to be found in emerging adulthood than in any other stage (i.e., not everyone possesses it), emerging adulthood exists in some cultures but not others (i.e., the stage is not universal), and most characteristics begin before emerging adulthood and continue afterward (i.e., they are not discrete; Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Personality Organization

"With regard to personality, increased instability during emerging adulthood and increased stability thereafter distinguish certain aspects of personality development during these years" (Tanner & Arnett, 2011, p. 16). The research they summarize suggests that changes in emerging adults are generally in the direction of greater stability and self-constraint, more reflective and planful behavior, less emotional instability, more responsibility and caution, a stronger sense of agency and mastery over the environment, and an increase in their sense of self-achievement. All in all, this is potentially good news for emerging adults who are apprehensive about the general direction of their development! As one former student (and now business executive) disclosed to one of the authors of this text after reading about emerging adulthood, "I could write novels about the changes I've experienced

between ages 25 to 32: everything from behavior, goals, personality, friendships, social life, and some extreme changes. It was an amazing time, maybe not the best of decisions sometimes, but I would never change a thing. But let me say, yikes! This is very real and relevant for me."

A Rise in Psychopathology Risk—and in Well-Being

Unfortunately, a distinctive feature of emerging adulthood is its high rate of psychopathology, including anxiety disorders (22% of the new cases), followed by (in descending order of prevalence) substance abuse, mood disorders, and impulse control disorders. Of those emerging adults who encountered a psychiatric disorder, 75% had at least one episode during childhood or adolescence. In contrast, about 70% of individuals deemed "low" in mental health problems during adolescence were classified the same in emerging adulthood. On the positive side, studies have revealed increases in perceived social support, satisfaction with life, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and resiliency, and decreases in loneliness, fatalism, derogation, anger, and depressive symptoms. The paradox of emerging adulthood as a period of simultaneous high hopes and increased psychopathology is attributed to findings indicating that most emerging adults experience rising well-being while an increasing minority confront psychopathology (Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Respite From Physical Disease

Although the rates of serious physical disorders may be low in emerging adulthood, conditions that predict serious problems later in life are common. For example, obesity has become a problem of epidemic proportions for Americans, including emerging adults, and is a strong predictor of subsequent health problems. Some researchers believe that lack of physical activity is a major factor causing obesity in this age group. Although the use of tobacco has declined in America, about 25% of emerging adults use this addictive substance. Disease accounts for only 2% of deaths among persons between 15 and 34, whereas 70% of the deaths in persons aged 18 to 25 are due to motor vehicle accidents, homicide, HIV infection, and suicide (causes that account for only 8% of the deaths in the general population of the United States). Impulse and risk behaviors together with incomplete brain development are factors associated with preventable deaths in emerging adults (Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Social Relationships and Educational Patterns

Emerging adulthood is also distinctive from other developmental stages in terms of the nature of social relationships and patterns of education. To understand these attributes of distinctiveness, Tanner created a framework she calls *recentering.* Recentering is a three-stage process that includes transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood (Stage 1), emerging adulthood proper (Stage 2), and transition out of emerging adulthood into young adulthood (Stage 3). Throughout these processes, the individual is challenged to accept increased responsibility for guiding himself or herself through this pivotal stage of life.

Stage 1 is a launching position in which the individual renegotiates his or her relationship with parents and weakens the bonds of dependency on them, as typified when an 18-year-old completes high school and leaves home for postsecondary education, a job, or military service. Cultural, religious, and social class differences may influence the nature of this transition. Family support during this stage is crucial and is predictive of a successful outcome of emerging adulthood.

In Stage 2, the emerging adult is peripherally tied to the identities and roles of adolescence but is also committed to trying out new identities (e.g., student, partner in a relationship, employee, volunteer, or soldier). In these roles, the individual is actively exploring roles and activities that may match his or her sense of identity to the extent that resources, opportunities, and time permit.

Emerging adulthood ends with Stage 3 of the recentering process, and young adulthood begins. "Identity exploration recedes at Stage 3, marking the beginning of identity consolidation occurring around commitments to careers, partners, children, community, and aging parents" (Tanner & Arnett, 2011, p. 24).

Recentering helps us understand the course of events during the early years of adulthood and provides a framework for predicting successful (or unsuccessful) adaptation to key events that shape an individual's life. Recentering promotes change from control by others to self-regulation, enables the individual to direct resources to choosing life goals, and can promote positive mental health (Tanner & Arnett, 2011).

Friendships

During this period, relationships with friends take on new meaning and may reach the peak of their functional significance. Not only are friends a valuable resource, but sometimes they can become more important than parents, on whom the individual is becoming less reliant. The number of friends remains fairly constant and the amount of time spent with them is high during this period; qualities such as loyalty, warmth, and sharing personal experiences remain important. Friends are often the preferred companions during this time, unless there is a romantic partner who serves that role. Emerging adulthood is the time when an individual's first serious romantic relationship occurs, when feelings of passion, intimacy, and social support are high. About 60% of emerging adults choose to cohabit with at least one partner before marriage, and about half these relationships culminate in marriage (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). In comparison with 1956, when the median age for marriage was 22 for men and 20 for women, in 2006, the median age was 28 for men and 24 for women (Arnett & Tanner, 2006). We examine friendships further with guest author Abby (Wilner) Miller in Chapter 11, "Your Personal Life Changes After College."

Education

Chances are you have been told since elementary school of the importance of earning a college degree (or higher) or you would not be reading this page. The attainment of a postsecondary education, whether in college or trade school, is a critical component in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, along with

the establishment of healthy relationships. College can be viewed as your moratorium—some say an institutionalized moratorium—to figure out who you are, what you believe, who you want to become, and what career you seek to establish.

You seek to become one of the 30% of Americans between 25 and 29 years old who earn a bachelor's degree. You chose not to become one of the millions of vulnerable Americans who fail to attain a postsecondary education and a satisfying life income (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). Like a growing number of college graduates facing the changing world of work, you believe your bachelor's degree may not be sufficient in the long run to achieve your goals, but you may not want to commit to a graduate or professional program yet. Delaying that decision is wise until you know the specific career you wish to have. You are still on your journey of professional and psychosocial development, and there will be time along the way to make informed decisions regarding additional education.

In summary, the concept of emerging adulthood provides a contemporary perspective for young people to understand the developmental aspects of their journey to adulthood. The core of emerging adulthood is anchored in a set of characteristics that its adherents maintain distinguish ages 18 to 25 in contemporary industrialized societies from the developmental stages in the Erikson framework. Emerging adulthood is the age of exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities. Emerging adulthood is also a period of changes in personality organization, neurological and cognitive development, increased psychopathology for some but increased well-being for most, low rates of physical disease but high rates of preventable death, and changes in social relationships and education patterns. As emerging adulthood is a relatively new perspective on development, continued research is needed to clarify its concepts and answer the many questions the theory raises. It has generated research across a number of fields in psychology, including research on the role of emerging adulthood across cultures (Jensen, 2011).

Time Out: Reflective Questions

1. To what extent do you identify with the five characteristics of emerging adulthood and with the issues of personality and other changes?

2. What are some of the changes, if any, you have experienced with family, friends, and significant others during the past few years?

What Qualities Do You Seek in a Full-Time Job?

Does our discussion of Erikson, Marcia, and Arnett and Tanner appear relevant but a bit abstract? To the extent that their concepts inform your understanding of the person you are becoming and contribute to the formation of your identity, a next step in your journey may be to explore the qualities, values, and conditions you seek in the work you perform after graduation. You have invested considerable capital in the form of money, time, effort, and expectations (yours and your

family's) to prepare for life after college, especially for a career that integrates your knowledge, skills, plans, and values; so what do you really want from the experience of your first job?

In a survey conducted by MonsterTRAK (Chao & Gardner, 2007), 9,000 young adults ages 18 to 25 were asked to rate 15 common job characteristics on their importance in a job search. Table 5.1 lists the characteristics in rank order of their importance.

Several points are worth noting about this data. As you scan the list, notice the values implied in the individual characteristics and their rankings. Chao and Gardner (2007) report that characteristics promoting long-term success (i.e., the first five) are rated higher than those reflecting a short-term emphasis (e.g., travel or prestigious company). The percentage of respondents who rated a particular characteristic as most important are as follows for the top six: interesting/engaging work, 88%; good benefits, 84%; secure job, 82%; promotion opportunities, 81%; learning opportunities, 77%; and location, 63%. Did you notice the percentage difference between learning opportunities (long-term factor) and location (more likely a short-term influence)? In the past, good benefits would not have received as high a ranking, but due to rising costs of health care and reductions in benefits implemented by many organizations, this aspect of employment has become a critical component of a satisfying job. Interesting work, chances for promotion, and opportunity to learn new skills are conditions that stimulate and reward high intrinsic motivation, whereas characteristics in the bottom portion of the table may be viewed as extrinsic

Table 5.1   Rank Order of 15 Job Characteristics Important to Young Adults' Job Search

Rank Order	Job Characteristic
1	Interesting work
2	Good benefits (e.g., health insurance)
3	Job security
4	Chances for promotion
5	Opportunity to learn new skills
6	Geographical location
7	Annual vacations of a week or more
8	High income
9	Flexibility in work hours
10	Regular hours—no nights/weekends
11	Being able to work independently
12	Limited job stress
13	Travel opportunities
14	Prestigious company
15	Limited overtime

Source: From Chao and Gardner (2007). Adapted with permission.

factors. High income was ranked in the middle in this survey, but students with high debt are likely to place income higher on the list.

The survey contained analyses across gender, ethnic affiliation, and academic major, but Chao and Gardner (2007) reported relatively consistent findings across these variables. You should also evaluate these characteristics within the context of the current economy. When the economy is down, companies often terminate employees and dissolve their positions (or outsource the work), reduce job benefits, limit promotions, and increase workloads; these are conditions that usually increase work hours (without overtime pay), alter work schedules, limit promotions, and increase job stress. Consequently, you should enter the workplace with realistic expectations: Be willing to be flexible in the tasks you perform, able to adapt to changing conditions, and willing to delay gratification of your most preferred job characteristics. It may be a few years and a few jobs before you perform interesting work that provides opportunities for promotion and learning new skills in an organization that offers good benefits and better security. During this time, you will probably reevaluate the importance of these characteristics and integrate the changes in your work values.

What effect does a poor economy have on emerging adults? When asked about coming of age in a post-recession world, Arnett (2011) offered the following observations:

1. Although young people are frustrated in a declining economy by not being able to find the kind of work they seek, they change jobs often in search of better opportunities and tend to be optimistic about the future.

2. The optimism of emerging adults, however, can lead to discouragement, anxiety, and depression if they experience unemployment year after year. If they can succeed in the struggle and find stable work, usually by the age of 30, the depression will likely lift.

3. When asked what resources emerging adults have for weathering a bad economy, Arnett replied,

They are very *resilient* physically and cognitively and emotionally. Yes, they're struggling, and they're struggling more than people in other age groups in some ways because of their higher unemployment rate, but they also have a lot to draw on in terms of their personal resources. (p. 34; emphasis added)

Why not take this quotation and tape it to your computer as a reminder during those tough days ahead that you are very capable of being resilient? As self-focused individuals, most emerging adults also have the advantage of having few if any responsibilities to individuals who may depend on them; many are able to move back home and live with family at least for a while.

4. Surviving a recession may become a wake-up call to emerging adults (and their parents) regarding the management of money. Overall, there appears to be an increase in savings and a reduction in spending and debt.

Time Out: Reflective Question

How do your perceptions and experiences with the national economy compare with Arnett's observations?

Closing Comments

View the completion of your baccalaureate in psychology as another milestone (but perhaps not your last) in your formal education *and* also as a point in your continuing psychosocial development. Concepts created by Erikson, expanded by Marcia, and extended to contemporary American society by Arnett and Tanner address conditions you may be experiencing and growth that will emerge in coming years. Yet recognize that entering the job market in a poor economy may also affect your trajectory of growth. Try to integrate the concepts you learned in this chapter into your continuing search for identity, especially as you plan the crucial steps of entering the workplace. Your early post-college experiences are likely to shape your future more than you know.

In earlier chapters, the material lent itself to providing specific recommendations. In this chapter, the information about psychosocial development may be less amenable to practical suggestions but is intrinsically valuable to understand. Our firm hope is that you study and reflect on the research presented here and evaluate and apply the concepts in the service of your ongoing development. Becoming an emerging adult is a period of apprehension, confusion, and concern even for the most confident and stable individual. Understanding the characteristics and experiences of other emerging adults can be comforting or disconcerting when we compare our thoughts, feelings, and situations with those of our peers as studied by developmental psychologists. If for no other reason, it is comforting to know an empirically derived literature exists for us to explore, test against the reality of our own experiences, and critically evaluate.

Getting Involved

Journal Starters

1. What are the most significant insights you gained from reading this chapter?

2. What insights gained from the previous chapter on career planning and development can you connect to your psychosocial development as they relate to (a) identity statuses and (b) emerging adulthood?

3. Review the rankings contained in Table 5.1. What are your five most important job characteristics? To what extent does each reflect primarily an occupational value or an ideological value?

Projects

1. Kloep and Hendry argue in Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, and Tanner (2011) that emerging adulthood should be viewed as a process, not a stage. Peruse this short book or similar discussions and prepare a report on the views of critiques of emerging adulthood. To what extent could the critics' arguments substantially change our discussion of emerging adulthood?

2. In the Chao and Gardner (2007) survey of job characteristics, high income was ranked eighth, but you may believe it should be higher. Locate other surveys about job characteristics and compare the rankings of the Top 5 to 10 most important qualities.

3. Arnett talks about resilience, a topic that has received considerable attention in recent years. Survey the literature on this topic in an area that interests you, such as health, the labor market, relationships, or the military's integration of this concept in the training of soldiers.

Additional Resource

URL	Brief Website Description
http://www.transad.pop.upenn.edu	The Network on Transitions to Adulthood examines the changing nature of early adulthood (ages 18–34) and the policies, programs, and institutions that support young people as they move into adulthood.

References

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2011, March). Coming of age in a post-recession world. *Monitor on Psychology, 42*(3), 32–34.

Arnett, J. J., Kloep, M., Hendry, L. B., & Tanner, J. L. (2011). *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J. J., & Tanner, J. L. (Eds.). (2006). *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Chao, G. T., & Gardner, P. D. (2007, Winter). *Important characteristics of early career jobs: What do young adults want?* (White paper prepared for MonsterTRAK). East Lansing: Michigan State University Collegiate Employment Research Institute. Retrieved from http://www.ceri.msu.edu/publications/publications.html

Cote, J. E. (2006). Emerging adulthood as an institutionalized moratorium: Risks and benefits to identity formation. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 85–116). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed: A review.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Farber, H. S. (2006, December). Is the company man an anachronism? Trends in long term employment in the U.S. between 1973 and 2005. *Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief, 38,* 1–2.

Fitzpatrick, M. D., & Turner, S. E. (2006, September). The changing college experience for young adults. *Network on Transitions to Adulthood Policy Brief, 34,* 1–3.

Hettich, P. I. (2009). College to workplace transitions: Becoming a freshman again. In T. M. Miller (Ed.), *Handbook of stressful transitions across the life span* (pp. 87–109). New York, NY: Springer.

Jensen, L. A. (Ed.). (2011). *Bridging cultural and developmental psychology: New syntheses in theory, research, and policy.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Levit, A. (2009). *They don't teach corporate in college: A twenty-something's guide to the business world* (2nd ed.). Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press.

McAdams, D. P. (2009). *The person: An integrated introduction to personality psychology.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt College.

Settersten, R. A., Jr., & Ray, B. (2010). What's going on with young people today? The long and twisting path to adulthood. *The Future of Children, 20,* 19–41.

Tanner, J. L., & Arnett, J. J. (2011). Presenting "emerging adulthood": What makes it developmentally distinctive? In J. J. Arnett, M. Kloep, L. B. Hendry, & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process?* (pp. 13–30). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.