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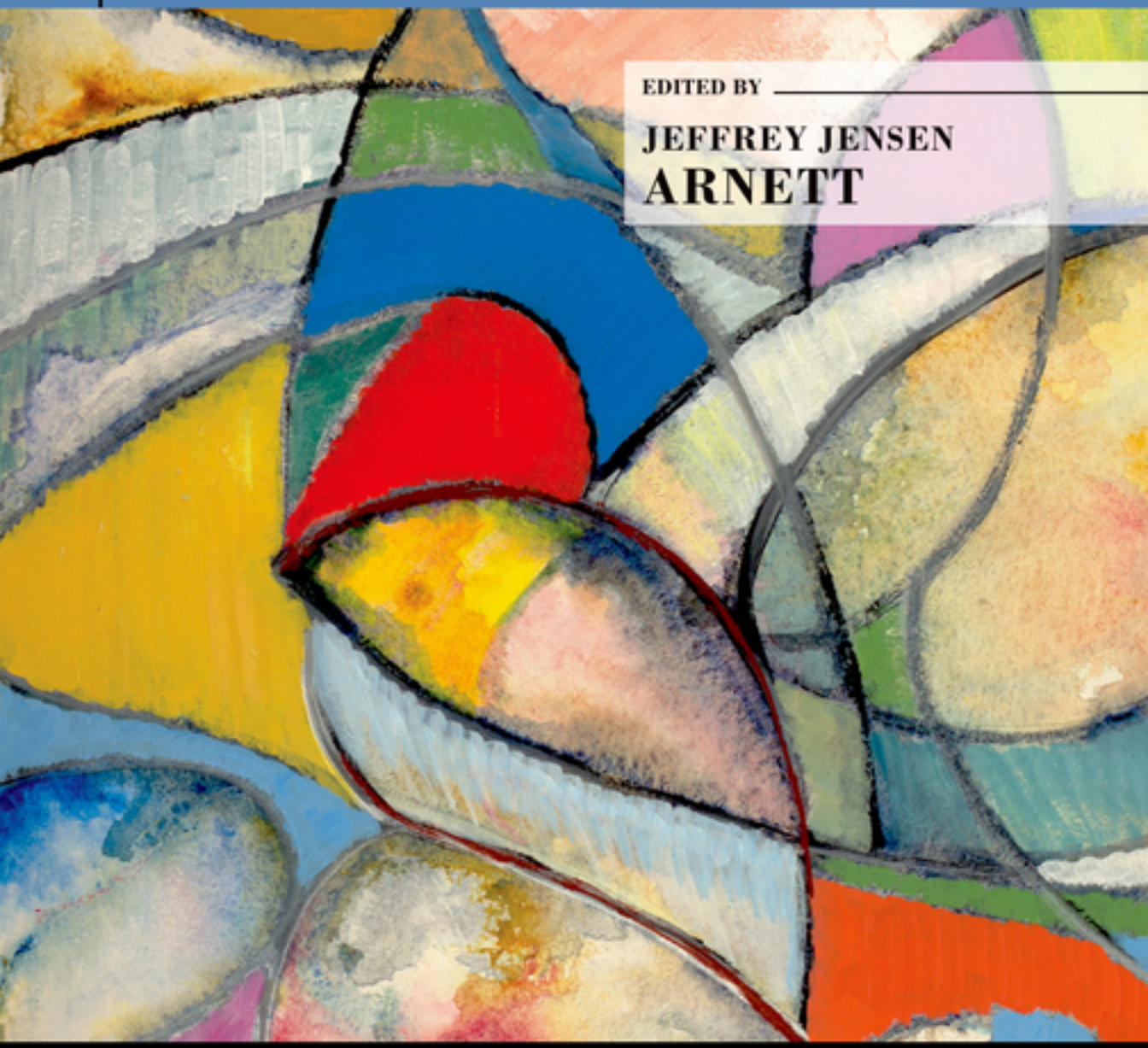

EDITED BY

JEFFREY JENSEN ARNETT

The Oxford Handbook *of* EMERGING ADULTHOOD

The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood

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ABOUT THE EDITOR

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett is a Research Professor in the Department of Psychology at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. He originally proposed the theory of emerging adulthood to describe the lives of today's 18- to 29-year-olds, and he is the Founding President and Executive Director of the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood (www.ssea.org). Among his many books is *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties, Second Edition* (OUP, 2015).

CONTRIBUTORS

Mona M. Abo-Zena
Brown University
Judy A. Andrews
Oregon Research Institute
Jeffrey Jensen Arnett
Clark University
Carolyn McNamara Barry
Loyola University Maryland
Marcia Baxter Magolda
Miami University
Stephanie Begun
University of Denver
Kimberly Bender
University of Denver
Andrea V. Breen
University of Guelph, Canada
Kathryn Butler
University of Victoria, Canada
Jason S. Carroll
Brigham Young University
Shannon E. Claxton
Kent State University
Jennifer Connolly
York University, Canada
Sarah M. Coyne
Brigham Young University
Jessica M. Craig
University of North Texas
Alyssa DeGrace
Loyola University Maryland
Julia Dietrich
University of Jena, Germany
M. Brent Donnellan
Michigan State University
Manuela du Bois-Reymond
Leiden University, Netherlands
Kristin Ferguson
Hunter College, City University of New York
Karen L. Fingerman
University of Texas at Austin
Constance Flanagan
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Soraya Giaccardi
University of Michigan
Johanna K. P. Greeson
University of Pennsylvania
Mary T. Hawkins
Deakin University, Australia
Emily Howard
Brigham Young University
Yeonwoo Kim
University of Texas at Austin
Patricia M. King
University of Michigan
Karen Strohm Kitchener
University of Michigan
Daniel Lapsley
University of Notre Dame
Primrose Letcher
University of Melbourne, Australia
Stephanie S. Luster
Brigham Young University
Koen Luyckx
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
Stephanie D. Madsen
McDaniel College
E. Anne Marshall
University of Victoria, Canada
Dan P. McAdams
Northwestern University
Kate C. McLean
Western Washington University
Alan Meca
University of Miami
Lauren L. Mitchell
University of Minnesota–Twin Cities

Elizabeth M. Morgan
Springfield College
Larry J. Nelson
Brigham Young University
Jerika C. Norona
University of Tennessee–Knoxville
Jennifer Núñez
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Meredith O'Connor
University of Melbourne, Australia
Craig Olsson
Deakin University, Australia
Laura M. Padilla-Walker
Brigham Young University
Jacob A. Paulsen
University of Minnesota
Koraly Perez-Edgar
Pennsylvania State University
Alex R. Piquero
University of Texas at Dallas
Teresa M. Preddy
University of Tennessee–Knoxville
Rachel Ritchie
Florida International University
Katariina Salmela-Aro
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Ann V. Sanson
University of Melbourne, Australia
Miri Scharf
University of Haifa, Israel
Seth J. Schwartz
University of Miami
Rita Seabrook
University of Michigan
Inge Seiffge-Krenke
University of Mainz, Germany
Shmuel Shulman
Bar Ilan University, Israel
Moin Syed
University of Minnesota
Bradley Taber-Thomas
Pennsylvania State University
Jennifer L. Tanner
Develop Institute, New Jersey
Kari Taylor
Miami University
Allison E. Thompson
University of Pennsylvania
Sanna Thompson
University of Texas–Austin
John W. Toumbourou
Deakin University, Australia
Kali H. Trzesniewski
University of California–Davis
Manfred H. M. van Dulmen
Kent State University
L. Monique Ward
University of Michigan
Deborah P. Welsh
University of Tennessee–Knoxville
Erika Westling
Oregon Research Institute
Paige Williams
University of Melbourne, Australia
Brian J. Willoughby
Brigham Young University
Ryan D. Woodbury
University of Notre Dame
Jenjira J. Yahirun
University of Texas at Austin
Byron L. Zamboanga
Smith College
Angie Zuo
University of Michigan

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The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood

CHAPTER

1

Introduction: Emerging Adulthood Theory and Research: Where We Are and Where We Should Go

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

Abstract

This chapter provides an introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood.* It begins with an overview of the aims and scope of the handbook. Then it summarizes briefly the content of the chapters to come. The handbook is comprised of 36 chapters organized into 10 parts, with each part containing from two to six chapters. The chapters cover a broad range of areas, from structural factors (such as social class) to relationships (from family to friends) to risk and resilience. The final section of this introductory chapter presents suggestions for the future of the field. The explosive expansion of the field over the past 15 years is noted, and suggestions are made for the field to focus more on EAs who do not attend college, devote more research to international variations in EA, and examine the transition from EA to the next life stage.

Key Words: emerging adulthood, development, adulthood, transition to adulthood, young adulthood, marriage, work

This is an auspicious time to bring together research in the field of emerging adulthood (EA) into one handbook. In just 15 years, EA has grown from a briefly sketched theoretical idea into a thriving, burgeoning field. The initial article I published in 2000 in *American Psychologist* (Arnett, 2000) was immediately embraced by numerous scholars and practitioners across a wide range of fields, less because of the content of the article—it was only a nascent theoretical idea, developed later into a broader theory—than because there were many people who had concluded, from their own research experience as well as their personal observations, that there was a need to distinguish the years from age 18 to 29 developmentally and to give this period a new name that would reflect its distinctiveness. Prior to that time, the period from the late teens through the 20s had gone by many names: extended adolescence, prolonged adolescence, the transition to adulthood, early adulthood, and young adulthood, among others.

Those terms were always unsatisfactory in some ways—for example, "adolescence" of any kind never fit well when applied to people in their 20s who were long past puberty—but by 2000, the typical experience of people aged 18–29 in developed countries had changed so much in recent decades that there was a serious need for a new conceptualization of this age period. Participation in tertiary education was expanding rapidly, as the shift accelerated from a manufacturing economy to an economy based mainly on services that required some knowledge of information and technology (e.g., business, finance, healthcare, education, and leisure). The ages for entering marriage and parenthood were soaring and were approaching 30 in most developed countries. It seemed clear that it no longer made sense to view ages 18–29 as part of a "young adulthood" stretching from age 18 to 40 or 45, because 18–29 had become a time not of settling into adult roles, but an exceptionally unsettled time. "Emerging adulthood" made sense to many people

as a new term for a new life stage, to distinguish it from puberty-based adolescence and from a more stable young adulthood.

Since 2000, there have been hundreds of studies on EA, and the pace of research in the field is still increasing. There is now a Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood (SSEA; www.ssea.org), with a flagship journal *Emerging Adulthood* (http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ead). There have been six conferences on EA, and the seventh conference will take place in 2015. This handbook brings together the research that has taken place so far, in a wide variety of areas. In this Introduction, I would like to review briefly what the handbook shows about where we are and also discuss where I believe we should go in EA theory and research.

Where We Are: Aims and Scope of This Volume

The handbook is organized into 10 parts, each containing from two to six chapters, for a total of 35 chapters (not including this Introduction). The first part presents theoretical perspectives. Moin Syed begins by taking on the issue of whether EA can be said to constitute a new life stage and a theory of development. There are diverse views in the social sciences of what a "life stage" is and what a "theory" is, and Syed addresses and analyzes critiques of EA pertaining to these issues, concluding that EA is "a theory in development—emerging perhaps—but that much more work needs to be done." Jacob Paulsen and his colleagues take on another contentious question. They examine generational changes in 18- to 29-year-olds, with a focus on whether today's emerging adults are more "narcissistic" than previous generations. This is a topic that has been hotly debated, but Paulsen and colleagues manage to provide a thorough and balanced perspective.

Part Two presents three chapters on structural factors, specifically social class, gender, and ethnicity. These are characteristics that provide a foundation for many other aspects of functioning in EA, from family relationships to substance abuse. In the first chapter in this section, Manuela du Bois-Reymond takes on the role of social class in the experience of EA. This has sometimes been a contentious issue in the field, but du Bois-Reymond examines the issue carefully and thoroughly, and also offers new data from a European project to inspire additional thinking on the topic.

Next, Jerika Norona and her colleagues examine a wide range of gender differences in EA, including areas such as identity development, sexuality, and mental health. The focus on gender differences highlights a variety of interesting and important findings; for example, that among women, there are no differences in substance use between those who attend college and those who do not, whereas, among young men, those who do not attend college report notably higher levels of marijuana and alcohol problems across ages 18–30 in comparison to college men. Norona and colleagues also venture beyond current studies to offer new theoretical ideas, employing Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to draw attention to the various contexts in which gender development takes place.

With regard to ethnicity, Moin Syed and Lauren Mitchell use the five features proposed in the theory of EA as a framework for discussing ethnic similarities and differences. They also provide a thoughtful analysis of the major challenges to conducting research in this area, which is sure to be instructive to other investigators.

The third part, on cognitive and brain development, contains three chapters: on cognitive development, brain development, and social cognition. Patricia King and Karen Kitchener draw on decades of research using their Reflective Judgment Model, along with other findings, to illuminate the complexity of cognitive skills that develop during the emerging-adult years. Bradley Taber-Thomas and Koraly Perez-Edgar provide a lucid overview of the burgeoning field of neuropsychology as it pertains to EA. Their chapter includes valuable insights on how culture and social context influence brain development and on how individual differences in neurodevelopmental trajectory may underlie differences in risk for psychological disorders. Finally, Dan Lapsley and Ryan Woodbury present promising ideas about social cognition in EA. This is a neglected area of emerging-adult research, so the authors creatively draw on related areas such as individuation and dyadic attachment, as well as recent neuroscience research on the social cognitive brain, with a particular focus on perspective-taking and mentalizing.

Part Four addresses the rich topic of family relationships. Karen Fingerman and Jenjira Yahirun provide a valuable overview, including an explanation for why today's emerging adults are more closely involved with their parents, and for longer, than in the past. They also take on the concept of "overparenting," known popularly as "helicopter" parenting, concluding that, in general, emerging adults need their parents' support and that lack of support is more common and more detrimental

than overparenting. Inge Seiffge-Krenke focuses on leaving-home patterns, including variations by culture, gender, and social class, as well as the influence of the quality of parents' and emerging adults' relationships on the timing of leaving home. Miri Scharf and Shmuel Shulman summarize the limited research on sibling relationships and offer ideas for future research. Like parent–child relationships, sibling relationships often improve in EA as a consequence of emerging adults' growing social-cognitive maturity. Finally, Scharf presents a chapter on relationships with grandparents—a topic even less researched than siblings, but one that will hopefully be stimulated by Scharf's ideas—including a case study that demonstrates the importance that this bond often has.

Part Five covers various aspects of friendships, romantic relationships, and sexuality. Carolyn Barry and colleagues address friendships, including important insights on how friendships change in the course of EA and how those changes reflect other life transitions in education, work, and romantic relationships. Shmuel Shulman and Jennifer Connolly review the literature on romantic relationships, then go beyond it to present their theory of a transitional emerging-adult romantic stage, Coordinating Romance and Life Plans, in which young people and their partners seek to integrate their career paths and life plans. Casual sexual relationships and experiences (CSREs) are reviewed by Shannon Claxton and Manfred van Dulmen, who report that CSREs are rarely as casual as they might seem, but typically involve a variety of emotional and social complications and consequences. Elizabeth Morgan covers the topic of sexual identity and orientation in a wide-ranging review that includes traditional and current conceptualizations of sexual orientation and identity, as well as recent findings assessing developmental trajectories, consistency between and within dimensions of sexual orientation and identity, stability of these dimensions, and issues of sexual identity labeling and categorization. Finally, Brian Willoughby and Jason Carroll summarize the new but rapidly growing field on marital beliefs and expectations and present their latest theoretical ideas concerning Marital Paradigm Theory and Marital Horizon Theory, which are sure to inspire new research.

Part Six pertains to education and work. First, Marcia Baxter Magolda and Kari Taylor summarize decades of research on the college student "self-authorship" concept and connect it for the first time to the theory and literature on EA self-development, an important theoretical advance. Next, Anne Marshall and Kathryn Butler address the key topic of school-to-work transitions. They set the stage with a summary of recent workforce changes, including globalization and labor market shifts, then focus on factors that shape the transition to work for today's emerging adults, including work expectations and increasing demands for knowledge and skills. The last chapter in this section, by Julia Dietrich and Katariina Salmela-Aro, also addresses the transition to work, but from a particular theoretical perspective, presenting the authors' model of "phase-adequate engagement" connecting career development, developmental regulation, and identity development theories in the context of the school-to-work transition.

EA is a time when media-related leisure is an important part of life, and this is the focus of Part Seven. Sarah Coyne and colleagues find that emerging adults spend more time daily in media use than in any other activity, and they examine the uses of media for purposes such as autonomy, identity development, and intimacy. They also examine the potential influences of media use across a wide range of areas, from academic achievement to body image. Monique Ward and colleagues focus on television, which is still remarkably popular among emerging adults even among all the new media forms available. They find a pattern of associations between TV watching and negative outcomes such as aggression and endorsement of sexual stereotypes, but also some positive effects on health beliefs and behaviors.

Part Eight, on the Self, begins with a chapter by Kate McLean and Andrea Breen on self-development. First, they review the considerable literature (although mainly on college students) on self-esteem and self-concept in EA. Then, they dig deeper, taking a narrative approach to describe how emerging adults develop a story of the self constructed out of culturally available materials, including those drawn from media such as television, movies, books, and social media. In the second chapter in this section, Seth Schwartz and colleagues summarize the abundant literature on identity development, mainly using the identity-status model. Identity explorations have been proposed as a common part of emerging adults' development, and Schwartz and colleagues present promising ideas for how to explore this proposition further. Next, Larry Nelson and Stephanie Luster present a chapter on conceptions of adulthood, delving into the complexities of the substantial international literature that has accumulated on this topic over the

past two decades and presenting not only an agenda for research but also some ideas for how the findings from this research could be applied by those who work with emerging adults. The section ends with a chapter by Dan McAdams, who emphasizes EA as a crucial time for "life authorship," using the biographies of Barack Obama and George W. Bush for illustration.

In Part Nine, on Cultural Beliefs, Padilla-Walker begins the section with a chapter on moral development. The literature on moral development is weighted heavily toward childhood and adolescence, but Padilla-Walker accumulates enough on moral cognition, moral emotion, moral identity, and prosocial behavior to persuade the reader that moral development thrives during EA as well, although many questions require further investigation. Carolyn Barry and Mona Abo-Zena's chapter on religious and spiritual development includes not only the fascinating variations in emerging adults' religious beliefs, but diverse contexts of their religious socialization, from parents of course but also from peers, religious communities, and media. In the final chapter of this section, Jennifer Núñez and Connie Flanagan show that EA is a key time for civic engagement and the development of political beliefs as young people begin to move into the adult world and decide what they believe about political and civic issues and how to express those beliefs.

The final part, on Risk and Resilience, begins with a chapter by Jennifer Tanner on mental health issues. A variety of mental health problems first appear in EA, and Tanner explains why from a developmental perspective, as well as offering strategies for helping emerging adults in crisis. Substance use and abuse peaks during the emerging-adult years, and, in their chapter Judy Andrews and Erika Westling delineate the risk factors, the consequences, and the developmental explanation for these patterns, including freedom from constraint, high disinhibition, and increased stress.

Crime also peaks at the outset of EA and then gradually declines, a pattern that has been documented for more than a century, and Jessica Craig and Alex Piquero explain why from a developmental perspective that has often been missing in this area. Next, Johanna Greeson and Allison Thompson address the important and often problematic issue of "aging out of care," the predicament of young people who have had to rely on state support during their early development but then find that support taken away once they enter EA. The authors present the promising concept of "natural mentoring" and discuss insights that can be gleaned from variations in public policies in England, Israel, and Australia. A related problem, homelessness in EA, is addressed by Sanna Thompson and her colleagues, applying a developmental perspective to this topic that is original and necessary. Meredith O'Connor and colleagues end this section, and the Handbook, with a chapter on resilience and positive development, using findings from the Australian Temperament Project to illustrate the findings in this area.

Where We Should Go: Missing Pieces and Future Agendas

The impressive range and quality of the chapters in this volume signifies clearly that EA is now a well-developed field of study, with hundreds of capable contributors. However, it is still a young field, little more than a decade old, and much remains to be learned. Here, I wish to draw attention to three directions I would like to see pursued more in EA theory and research in the decade to come: non-college routes through EA, international variations, and the transition from EA to the next stage of life.

Non-college Paths Through EA

In my article first presenting the outlines of the theory of EA (Arnett, 2000), I proposed that part of the value of conceptualizing the years from age 18 to 29 as a life stage is that doing so would draw attention to this period as a focus of research, especially with regard to the "forgotten half" of young people who do not attend college following secondary school:

> The forgotten half remains forgotten by scholars, in the sense that studies of young people who do not attend college in the years following high school remain rare . . . . Emerging adulthood is offered as a new paradigm, a new way of thinking about development from the late teens through the twenties, especially ages 18–25, partly in the hope that a definite conception of this period will lead to an increase in scholarly attention to it.

Fifteen years later, a substantial amount of research has added to our understanding of non-college emerging adults, as the chapters in this volume by DuBois-Reymond, Deitrich and Salmela-Aro, and Marshall and Butler show abundantly. Nevertheless, as Syed points out in this volume, the majority of research on EA still focuses on college students and the college-educated, even now. Why is that the case, when non-college

emerging adults face greater challenges in finding a job and creating a fruitful adult life than their college-educated counterparts? The simple answer is that college students are easy to find for researchers who are professors on a college campus (as most of us are), and they are usually willing to take part in research for the modest inducement of a few points in a course on psychology. However, such samples are seriously unrepresentative of the majority of emerging adults, being more educated, less ethnically diverse, and from more affluent families (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

Research on non-college emerging adults is especially urgent because they are falling further and further behind the college-educated, across societies (Arnett, 2015). Their unemployment rate is typically twice as high as for their college-educated peers. Over the course of a lifetime, in the United States, it is estimated that they will earn $1 million less than those who have obtained a four-year college degree. In an economy shifting rapidly away from manufacturing toward information, technology, and services, those who do not obtain sufficient tertiary education are increasingly being left behind.

So, what steps can we take to promote the expansion of EA research to those who either do not obtain tertiary education at all or who attend community colleges or training programs that are outside the easy access of most researchers? One important step is to bring together researchers with common interests on this topic, so that they can share information and resources. The SSEA (www.ssea.org) has recently established a Topic Network on Work and Career that could be one instrument for this purpose. Perhaps equally important is to emphasize to the community of EA researchers the importance of studying non-college emerging adults, not only to expand the scope of our knowledge on EA but to direct needed attention to the lives of those who are especially struggling to make their way in the modern economy and to help devise ways to assist them.

International Variations: Crossing Borders

EA is an international phenomenon, applying across developed countries and growing rapidly in developing countries (Arnett, 2011). All developed countries have experienced similar demographic changes pertaining to ages 18–29 in the past half century: longer education for a larger proportion of the population, later entry to marriage, and later entry to parenthood (Arnett, 2011; Arnett, Žukauskiene, & Kazumi, 2015). Although the theory of EA was originally based on my research on young Americans, there are many developed countries in which tertiary education is more widespread, and, in every other developed country, the median ages of entering marriage and parenthood are higher than they are in the United States. In developing countries, relatively few young people obtain tertiary education, and their median ages of entering marriage and parenthood are considerably lower than in developed countries; Arnett, 2015). However, developing countries around the world are changing rapidly, and all of them have an urban middle class whose experience of ages 18–29 is demographically similar to that seen in developed countries. I have proposed that emerging adulthood is a "21st century theory," in the sense that, by the end of the 21st century, there will be demographic similarities around the world for ages 18–29 (i.e., the vast majority will obtain some form of tertiary education, and median ages of entering marriage and parenthood will be at least 30 across countries; Arnett, 2007).

However, even with demographic similarities, there may be many variations in how EA is experienced across countries and cultures (Arnett, 2011; Douglass, 2007). For example, as Fingerman and Yahurin show in their chapter in this volume, within Europe, emerging adults in the northern countries typically leave home immediately after the end of secondary school and never return there to live (also see Iacovou, 2011). In contrast, emerging adults in the southern countries mostly remain home until marriage, which typically does not take place until around age 30. These differences reflect cultural differences regarding the relative importance of striving for independence versus maintaining mutual support within the family. There are also differences worldwide in conceptions of adulthood. As Nelson and Luster show in their chapter, studies in Western countries have found consistently that the Big Three criteria for adulthood are accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. However, in India, the top criteria named by emerging adults are emotional self-control, abiding by social norms, and fulfilling traditional gender roles (Seiter & Nelson, 2011), and for young women factory workers in China, the ability to care for parents is the top criterion (Zhong & Arnett, 2014).

These variations demonstrate the importance of expanding the scope of research on EA so that it is worldwide. Currently, the majority of research on EA—as well as on infancy, childhood, adolescence, and later adulthood—takes place in the United

States (Arnett, 2008). This is primarily because the United States has more colleges and universities than any other country, and it devotes a higher proportion of its resources to research, including social science research. This volume, it must be admitted, is heavily weighted toward American contributors and research because that is mostly what is available at this time. However, the new SSEA is dedicated to representing international perspectives (see www.ssea.org). This includes having non-Americans in leadership positions and establishing Topic Networks on Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. Hopefully, in another 10 years, there will be a second edition of this Handbook that is far more international and culturally diverse.

What Lies Beyond EA? Toward a New Conception of the 30s

Twenty years ago, when I first began studying 18- to 29-year-olds, there was little research on this age period. True, there were, and are, innumerable studies of college students, especially in social psychology, but these were mostly not concerned with the distinctive developmental characteristics of 18- to 29-year-olds, but rather studied them under the highly dubious assumption that they could be used to represent all humanity (Arnett, 2008). There was little attention paid to those who did not attend college and even less attention to the rest of the 20s, beyond the college years.

Today, there is a large and growing body of research on EA, as this volume shows. However, there has been little attention paid to what follows EA. Because the "transition to adulthood" now takes place closer to age 30 than to age 20—"30 is the new 20," as the popular American phrase goes—there is now a need to examine what happens in people's lives once they have made their commitments in love and work and have set up the stable structure of an adult life. So far, we have some excellent studies of the transition to marriage and parenthood (e.g., Cherlin, 2009; Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009) and of work trajectories through adulthood (e.g., Blustein, 2006). However, there has been little attempt made to put the different parts of life together with respect the 30s and see what a whole life looks like from a developmental perspective during this decade.

Perhaps this will be a new horizon for EA research in the years to come, to look at what makes for a successful transition to a stable adult life in the 30s. Recently, I had the opportunity to direct a national survey of 25- to 39-year-olds in the United States (Arnett & Schwab, 2014). Many of the findings were illuminating. For example, it was striking (and disturbing) that a substantial majority of these established adults believed that they had not obtained enough education to prepare themselves for the world of work. Nearly two-thirds (61%) wished they had obtained more education than they have now (with rates especially high among Latinos [81%] and African Americans [70%]). Financial reasons seemed to be the main obstacle: 43% said they have not been able to find enough financial support to get the education they need (with rates again highest among Latinos [56%] and African Americans [48%]). But they had not given up: 70% expect to get additional education or training at some point. These findings indicate the importance of exploring further the 30s decade and examining how patterns found in the emerging-adult years continue or change in the life stage that follows.

Conclusion: Much Accomplished, Much to Be Done

In sum, this handbook presents the most comprehensive collection of information on ages 18–29 yet assembled. The presenters are a stellar cast, with outstanding contributions to their areas of research, and they have provided not only a summary of current research but many creative and promising ideas about where future research would be most fruitfully directed. They have shown what has been accomplished so far in research on EA and given us a map of where we should go from here. I look forward to the journey.

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PART 1

Theoretical Perspectives

CHAPTER

2

Emerging Adulthood: Developmental Stage, Theory, or Nonsense?

Moin Syed

Abstract

Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood has been both widely celebrated and strongly criticized. However, it has not yet been closely scrutinized for what it claims to be: "*a new theory of development* for the late teens though the twenties." The purpose of this chapter is to take up this scrutiny, evaluating some of the major postulations and criticisms of emerging adulthood in light of the available evidence. In particular, the chapter focuses on three broad claims pertaining to emerging adulthood: (1) that it is a developmental stage, (2) that it is a theory, and (3) that it is nonsense. The analysis presented in the chapter is not meant to resolve the debates in the field but rather to examine the nuance and celebrate the complexity of the questions in order to stimulate further theory and research on the topic.

Key Words: emerging adulthood, theory, developmental stages, transition to adulthood, philosophy of science

> I propose a new theory of development from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18–25. I argue that this period, *emerging adulthood*, is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both.
>
> — *Arnett,* 2000, p. 469

In proposing the concept of emerging adulthood, Arnett (2000, 2004) made two moves that are rarely seen in contemporary developmental science: (1) he proposed a new phase of the life span, and (2) he proposed a new grand theory through which to understand this new phase. Not surprisingly, these moves have generated not only much interest among researchers (and the public), but also much derision. Despite the fact that the theory of emerging adulthood has been both widely celebrated and strongly criticized, it has not yet been closely scrutinized for what it claims to be: "*a new theory of development* for the late teens though the twenties." The purpose of this chapter is to take up this scrutiny, evaluating some of the major postulations and criticisms of emerging adulthood in light of the available evidence. In particular, I evaluate three broad claims pertaining to emerging adulthood: (1) that it is a developmental stage, (2) that it is a theory, and (3) that it is nonsense.

Emerging Adulthood Defined

As captured succinctly by the quote at the opening of this chapter, emerging adulthood is meant to describe a new life stage for the period between adolescence and adulthood. Importantly, it is not considered a universal life stage but instead one that has emerged in certain industrialized societies due to social and economic changes that have led to delays in marriage, parenthood, and the assumption of other adult roles (Arnett, 2000, 2011). These changes are far-ranging, including increased participation in higher education, changes in attitudes toward premarital sex,

increased women's rights, and profound changes in the meaning of adulthood itself (Arnett, 2004; see also Waters, Carr, Kefalas, & Holdaway, 2011). Emerging adulthood has five defining features, according to Arnett (2004): *identity exploration*, in which young people are searching to find meaning in work, relationships, and ideologies; *instability*, which refers to individuals' tendencies to change residences, jobs, and relationships more frequently than at other times of life; *possibilities*, which captures the optimistic spirit of emerging adulthood, referring to the many options that emerging adults see before them; *self-focus*, which refers to emerging adults' relative freedom from obligations to parents, spouses, and children, allowing them to pay greater attention to their own lives; and *feeling in-between*, which is indicative of the subjective experience of emerging adults who acknowledge feeling not quite like adolescents any longer but also not yet fully like adults.

Although Arnett (1994, 1997, 1998; Arnett & Taber, 1994) had been publishing about the changing nature of both adolescence and adulthood for some years, it was not until his 2000 article in *American Psychologist* that the theory of emerging adulthood was released to the scholarly public. The ideas he put forth were quickly celebrated. Within a few years came the first Conference on Emerging Adulthood, an authored book (Arnett, 2004), an edited book (Arnett & Tanner, 2006), coverage in the popular media (e.g., *Time* and *New York Times Magazine*), a professional society (Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood), a new journal (*Emerging Adulthood*), and now this Handbook. Clearly, emerging adulthood struck a chord within academia and the public at large.

The criticism of emerging adulthood, however, came just as quickly as the celebration. Indeed, debate has been endemic to the theory of emerging adulthood. At the Conferences of Emerging Adulthood, there have been plenary sessions that featured debates about whether the implications of emerging adulthood are positive or negative for development and even whether the concept is useful at all. The latter debate was published as a back-and-forth in *Child Development Perspectives* (Arnett, 2007*a*, 2007*b*; Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*, 2007*b*) and then further developed into a co-authored book (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). The first issue of the new journal *Emerging Adulthood* began with an exchange between Arnett (2013) and Twenge (2013) about whether emerging adults are more narcissistic and self-absorbed than ever before. In short, the theory of emerging adulthood has its fair share of critics.

In the following section, I provide more detail about the primary criticisms of emerging adulthood. Collectively, I refer to these criticisms as "the nonsense," not to disparage them, but rather to highlight how the criticisms all suggest that emerging adulthood, either in part or totality, is nonsense. Indeed, all of the points made are well-reasoned and valid and will require serious attention from scholars as work on emerging adulthood continues.

Before I move on, however, it is important to note that I am not exactly an impartial observer. I have been involved with what would ultimately become the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood since 2007. I am now a member of the Governing Board of the Society and an associate editor of *Emerging Adulthood*, the Society's journal. Although it is not my aim to provide a biased evaluation that favors emerging adulthood, these involvements undoubtedly color the analysis that follows.

Emerging Adulthood as Nonsense

Many critics of emerging adulthood seem to be operating within Sagan's (1980) dictum, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," feeling that Arnett and others have not provided sufficient evidence to support such lofty claims of a new phase of the life span. The criticisms are wide-ranging, but can be organized into six broad points:

1. *The ideas behind emerging adulthood are not new.* This is a particularly frequent criticism among sociologists, who for some time had been charting the changing nature of the transition to adulthood (Côté, 2000; Hartmann & Swartz, 2006; Waters et al., 2011). Indeed, in the prologue to his classic work, *Identity: Youth and Crisis,* Erikson (1968) seemed to foresee not only the changing nature of adulthood, but that the change may produce a new phase of the life span:

> . . . young adulthood will be divided into older and younger young adults, the not too young and not too old specialists probably moving into the position of principal arbiters—each for the limited period of ascendance of a particular stage of his specialty. His power, in many ways, will replace tradition as the sanction of parenthood. (pp. 38–39)

Thus, the ideas behind emerging adulthood have been swirling around for some time. As such, this would be an accurate criticism of Arnett were it not

for the fact that he fully recognized the existence of these ideas in his formulation (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Arnett & Tanner, 2011). What was new, however, was the integration of multiple sources of information into a theory of development during a particular point in the life span. Furthermore, the research tradition in sociology was (and still is) to refer to the period as the "transition to adulthood." As Arnett (2004) remarked, referring to it as a "transition" suggests that the period is fleeting and "leads to a focus on what young people in that age period are *becoming*, at the cost of neglecting what they *are*" (p. 19; emphasis in original). In contrast, emerging adulthood seeks to understand the psychological experience of young people as they occupy that life space.

2. *Emerging adulthood is historically specific.* Hendry and Kloep (2007*a*) warn that it is dangerous to promote a theory of development based on historical trends, fads, or fashions. In their view, theories should be applicable across space and time. This view, however, is hard to defend. Human society has changed dramatically across the world in the past 100 years. These changes have been associated with accompanying changes in how humans function and interact with one another. Here again, Erikson (1968) eloquently states the importance of changing conditions:

> A new generation growing up with and in technological and scientific progress as a matter of course will be prepared by the daily confrontation with radically new practical possibilities to entertain radically new modes of thought. This may form a link between a new culture and new forms of society, allowing for ways of balancing specialization with new inner freedom. (p. 38)

If society and individuals therein are changing, do we not also need new theories to understand the changes that have come about? As discussed later in the chapter, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that contemporary adolescence in industrialized societies, now taken as a given by researchers, is a relatively recent invention that came about in response to changes in society, most notably compulsory schooling and child labor laws (Hall, 1904; see also Arnett, 2006; but see Schlegel & Barry, 1991).

3. *Emerging adulthood is not a positive time.* Arnett (2004) has found that emerging adults tend to have a positive sense about their current situation and the future. They enjoy life and have an optimistic and hopeful view of the future, which is captured in the theory by the *age of possibilities*. Although Arnett (2004) has viewed this positivity with some skepticism, the theory of emerging adulthood contains a strong positive aura, one that has been the source of some criticism. Unlike the other criticisms described here, the issue is not the reality and utility of emerging adulthood itself, but rather how it is conceptualized and portrayed by psychologists. In particular, critics reject Arnett's (2004) optimistic view of emerging adulthood as a time of exploration and opportunity and suggest that the causes and consequences of emerging adulthood are restrictive in nature. Côté (2000, 2006; Côté & Bynner, 2008) discussed several economic and social factors that lead to a *forced* emerging adulthood. For example, shifts in labor demands from manufacturing to service have led to restrictions for positive job opportunities absent higher education. This change has resulted in higher rates of attendance in higher education because many emerging adults view college as the only route to a secure, well-paying job. At the same time, the lack of contemporary social norms governing behavior and life choices has led to a diffusion of choice—wandering rather than exploring—which requires greater effort to achieve a stable identity. Taking a somewhat different perspective, Smith (2011) argued that the changes that led to the creation of emerging adulthood have also led to a compromised sense of morality and disengagement from generative aspects of society, such as civic and political involvement. Importantly, neither Côté, Smith, nor any others who share these views makes the claim that emerging adulthood is all negative; rather, they highlight the negative aspects of the life stage to bring balance to the positivity that Arnett made central to emerging-adulthood theory.

4. *Emerging adulthood only applies to certain people.* The argument that emerging adulthood only applies to a certain sector of the world's population is, arguably, the most frequent criticism. The argument is made both in terms of generalizability beyond highly industrialized societies, as well as within those societies. Concerning the latter, emerging adulthood is often argued as a luxury that can only be experienced among those with sufficient means. As such, some critics doubt that youth who occupy marginal social positions—mainly in terms of race/ethnicity, social class, and educational attainment—are emerging adults (Bynner, 2005; Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*, 2007*b*, 2011; Kloep & Hendry, 2011). However, Arnett (2000) originally argued that the theory of emerging adulthood could bring greater

attention to the developmental experiences of the "forgotten half." Indeed, in his early research, Arnett (2004) included youth with diverse social class and educational backgrounds, and he has increasingly devoted attention to the applicability of emerging adulthood across class lines (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). Who "gets to be" an emerging adult is a site of ongoing inquiry in the literature and is discussed in more detail later in the chapter (see also Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

5. *Stages are not good.* Nearly since the inception of the field of developmental psychology, there has been a debate about how to conceptualize the course of development (Arnett & Tanner, 2009). On the one hand, developmental psychology has been dominated by "grand theories" that conceptualized development in terms of a series of universal stages or *discontinuous* phases of development (e.g., Freud, Piaget, Loevinger, Kohlberg). The opposing view is one that promotes *continuous* development, in which change is conceptualized as gradual and contextually dependent. Life course theory, life span theory, developmental contextualism, and dynamic systems theories are all examples of theories that conceptualize development as continuous in nature (Baltes, 1987; Elder, 1998; Lerner, 1996; Thelen & Smith, 1994). Arnett (2000) jumped right into the middle of this simmering debate when he proposed emerging adulthood as a new *life stage*. Accordingly, this aspect of emerging adulthood has been a source of major criticism.

6. *Emerging adulthood is not really a theory.* Arnett (2000, 2004, 2012) has always referred to emerging adulthood as a *theory*. Arguing that it is a theory, rather than a new life stage only, has opened the door for a specific set of criticisms (Hendry, 2011; Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*, 2007*b*, 2011; Kloep & Hendry, 2011). The main argument against emerging adulthood being a theory is that it is merely descriptive rather than explanatory. Arnett and Tanner (2009, 2011) have retorted that a good measure of a theory is the degree to which it is useful and generates subsequent research, which they argue emerging adulthood has accomplished. This exchange cuts to the very core of social science research, raising questions about what a theory is and ought to be.

These six criticisms are not purported to represent an exhaustive list but instead represent my own synthesis of the major challenges that are presented to the theory of emerging adulthood. Additionally, they are not always so easily separated into distinct criticisms. For example, part of the reason that Hendry and Kloep (2007*a*) argue against emerging adulthood as a new life stage is that it only applies to certain people. In what follows, I take analysis of two of the criticisms—that stages are not good and that emerging adulthood is not really a theory—into much greater depth because I find them to be the most powerful, far-reaching, and interesting points. In doing so, I also incorporate aspects of the other four criticisms, again highlighting the interconnectedness of the issues.

Stage vs. Process: A Long-standing Debate in Developmental Science

Hendry and Kloep (2007*a*), who are among the most visible critics of emerging adulthood, invoke a long-standing debate in developmental science: does development occur in stages, or is development a continuous process? One of the major issues they take with emerging adulthood is that it perpetuates stage-like thinking. In this section, I first discuss the ideas of "stages" by considering some well-known developmental stage theories. I then specifically examine emerging adulthood as a stage theory, highlighting some necessary future directions.

Flavell (1963) defined a developmental stage as one "whose qualitative similarities and differences serve as a conceptual landmark in trying to grasp [a] process" (p. 19). Stages involve four properties: (1) they index *qualitative change*, in that the differences between successive changes is that of type rather than quantity; (2) they are *invariant* because development must occur in sequence, and individuals may not skip a stage, (3) they are *hierarchical* because earlier stages provide the foundation for development to occur at later stages; and (4) they are *coherent*, with individuals showing integrated functioning across a variety of domains (Flavell, 1963, 1971). Stages of this sort are common defining features of the grand theories of developmental psychology, perhaps none more so than Piaget's (1970) stages of cognitive development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational). Piaget's theory continues to be a dominant force in research on child development, which can be seen in the large literatures on object permanence, joint attention, and theory of mind, among many others.

Flavell's definition of a developmental stage represents the general thinking about stages in the developmental literature, but it is not the only way of conceptualizing stages. Take, for example, Erik Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of development. Erikson specified a life span model of development consisting of eight psychosocial tensions.

Although frequently described as a stage theory, the theory is not consistent with the definition of a stage provided by Flavell (1963). Erikson's model specifies that all eight tensions reside within individuals at all points in development but that, at different phases of the life span, one of the tension presents itself as central and in need of resolution. Resolution of one tension provides the foundation for resolution in a subsequent tension, so, in this way, the tensions are hierarchical. Strictly speaking, however, they are not invariant, as the sequence of identity (tension 5) and intimacy (tension 6) clearly illustrates. Whereas identity serves as the foundation for successful intimate relations, individuals can certainly engage in intimacy without having established a reasonably clear identity (Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia 2009; Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Under Eriksonian theory, that relationship is unlikely to be a successful one, but there is nothing precluding someone from engaging in it or from thinking that intimacy is and should be the prime psychosocial concern of his or her era. Furthermore, disruptions in one of the tensions can result in a revisiting of previously resolved tensions, thus violating the principle of invariance. Once again considering identity and intimacy, dissolution of an important relationship can cause an individual to revisit his or her identity, even if it had been previously strong (Cookston & Remy, 2015). Thus, for Erikson's theory, there is not a sense of progression that leaves previous issues behind. All resolutions are subject to further scrutiny if the context demands it.

Of course, there is an even broader stage model that is widely used by both researchers and society at large: the *age-stage model*, as I call it.[1] The life span has been divided into a series of stages based on certain age markers: prenatal, infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Just as with the psychological stages of Piaget and Erikson, these stages are mostly arbitrary and can be divided into substages. For example, the prenatal stage consists of three stages (germinal, embryonic, and fetal), and adolescence is often divided into early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence. With increasing age comes decreasing certainty in the markers of when one age-stage ends and the next one begins. This is due, in part, to the close connection between age-stages and schooling (e.g., early childhood and preschool, adolescence and secondary school).[2] Beyond secondary school, there are no longer institutionalized parameters to define an age-stage. For this reason, sociologists have long used the "Big Five" markers of adulthood: leaving home, finishing school, getting a job, getting married, and having children (Settersten, 2011). These markers, however, are much more fluid than the age-graded nature of schooling, and thus there is greater flexibility in how we define age-stages in the third decade of life and beyond.

Understood within this context, adulthood age-stages (i.e., after age 18) are "up for grabs," in that researchers can demarcate them the way they see fit, and there is plenty of room for new theorizing on its subdivisions. Old age is a case in point. The latter years of the life span, approximately 65 years and later, has been subject to considerable discussion to understand its heterogeneity. Currently favored subdivisions consists of the young old, old old, and oldest old, but there is no agreement on the use of the terms or where any of the age cutoffs should be located (Binstock, 1992; Neugarten, 1974; Suzman, Willis, & Manton, 1995). Nevertheless, the ongoing engagement with the topic reflects the belief that there is important heterogeneity in the life span beyond age 65, to which a single age-stage not only does disservice, but also discourages ongoing investigation into this heterogeneity.

It is within this spirit that Arnett (2000) proposed *emerging adulthood* as a new age-stage. If adolescence ends at age 18 and old age begins at age 65, then a vast portion of the life span, 18–65, is left relegated to adulthood. Of course, some make a distinction between young adulthood and midlife (e.g., Lilgendahl, Helson, & John, 2013; Orth, Trzesniewski, & Robbins, 2010), but these terms are not used consistently and are arbitrary even by age-stage standards. Arnett's emerging adulthood is a far less arbitrary proposal. In particular, rather than being only a descriptive label for an age-stage (to be used in lieu of 18–29), emerging adulthood has underlying psychological features (e.g., the five features). Moreover, its entry and ending points are based on sociocultural markers that are relevant to that particular point in time. In the United States, age 18 is the legal definition of adulthood and is the approximate age when young people complete secondary school. The late 20s are the time when young people in the United States and other highly industrialized countries now tend to assume the stable adult roles that have historically defined adulthood: marriage, children, stable work, and so on (Arnett, 2011). Thus, emerging adulthood is bookended by socially proscribed developmental milestones.

Stages have long been controversial within developmental psychology. With their focus on qualitative changes and consistent holistic internal

structures, stage theories reflect *discontinuous* views on development. The primary view, in contrast to stage-theories, is that of *continuous* development. Whereas stage theories articulate rapid periods of change followed by relative stability, continuous theories emphasize incremental, ongoing development. Continuous development can be irregular—involving the changes and plateaus of stage theories—but such irregularities are not regarded as age-graded and are more idiosyncratic than normative. There are many different approaches to continuous development, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to review them here (see Arnett & Tanner, 2009, for a partial review in the context of stage theories). My focus in the remainder of this section is on general criticisms of stage theories, both writ large and in terms of emerging adulthood.

One criticism levied at stage theories from proponents of continuous development is the use of substages in their models. As discussed earlier, age-stages, such as prenatal and adolescence, are frequently divided up into substages. This is also the case for psychological stages. Piaget's sensorimotor stage is a prime example. The first stage in Piaget's model, the sensorimotor stage begins at birth and proceeds until approximately age 2 or the time at which the child is capable of internal thought. However, to explain the changes that occur *during* the stage—which, by definition, involves little change—Piaget developed six substages for those 2 years (e.g., primary circular reactions, secondary circular reactions). The substages reflect the increasing ability to coordinate thought and action, which is the primary developmental task of the sensorimotor stage (hence the "sensorimotor" label). As substages are added and refined, the theory begins to resemble a continuous theory in which development is constant, in lieu of identifiable long stretches of stability. This issue of substages in emerging adulthood is important, and few researchers have addressed it directly. There are occasional references to early, middle, and late emerging adulthood, suggesting that researchers find emerging adulthood itself to be too broad (e.g., Tanner, 2006). The definitions of these substages, however, are not clear and have been scantly investigated.

In terms of emerging-adulthood theory specifically, one of the salient arguments against it is that it is both inappropriate and dangerous to create a new life stage that is not universal. The universality criticism applies at two levels: within and between countries. Within countries, it has been argued that emerging adulthood only applies to those who are privileged enough to enjoy it, often defined as white, middle-class, and college students—despite the fact that Arnett's (2004) original research included ethnically diverse emerging adults who were not in college. There are few data, however, to back up these claims, and the argument is much more complex than it may seem on its surface (see Arnett & Tanner, 2011; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). We took up the issue of race/ethnicity in depth in Syed and Mitchell (2013), so here I briefly focus on class and college—more specifically, on how they intersect.

The equating of middle-class, college students and privilege/luxury relies on outdated stereotypes. Those who are often referred to as "traditional" college students—attending 4-year residential college straight out of secondary school—have become the minority in the United States. Indeed, nearly three-fourths of college students are considered "nontraditional" in some way, due to increased age, attending community college or vocational school, heavy paid work commitments, being a parent, and so on (Waters, Carr, Kefalas & Holdaway 2011). Thus, assuming that all college students are privileged is based more on myth than reality. To be sure, there are severe disparities in college attendance and graduation by social class (Haskins, Holzer, & Lerman, 2009). Nevertheless, there are youth from low-income backgrounds who attend college, just as there are those from wealthy families who do not, thus indicating the need to examine how emerging adulthood applies in terms of class and college, both separately and as they interact. Unfortunately, few empirical studies have done this.

Critics also argue that emerging adulthood is not apparent around the world. Indeed, from the beginning, Arnett (2000) indicated that emerging adulthood was a new life stage in highly industrialized countries, where the social and economic conditions were ripe for it (see Arnett, 2011, for a more recent and nuanced discussion). Thus, there is broad agreement that, at least between countries, emerging adulthood is not universal. But does this fact disqualify it from being a developmental age-stage? Those of you readers who answer in the affirmative may want to take a closer look at the age-stage immediately preceding emerging adulthood: adolescence. Adolescence is not experienced equally across the world, and there is debate about whether or not adolescence exists in all cultures (Schlegel & Barry, 1991). For those cultures in which there is a period of adolescence, there is tremendous variation in the

form and function of adolescence. Adolescence is viewed as a time of preparation, in which biological and social transitions deliver the child into adulthood. Thus, the definition of adulthood has implications for understanding the function of adolescence. In industrialized countries, adulthood is often marked by *independence*, whereas in traditional cultures it is often marked by *marriage*. These different markers of adult status suggest that the developmental tasks of adolescence will be different for adolescents living in these different cultures, despite the fact that both are considered "adolescents." Despite the rather stark culture differences in adolescence, there are few serious scholarly attempts made to question adolescence as a life stage. Rather, attention is devoted to variations in how adolescence is conceptualized and experienced. Indeed, Arnett (2011) draws on the scholarly work on adolescence in his development of the concept of "many emerging adulthoods." Rather than a singular understanding of emerging adulthood, Arnett argues for emerging adulthood as a cultural theory, in which emerging adulthood is shaped by social class, ethnicity, gender, religion, economics, and so on. Although the general outline of emerging adulthood may be the same around the world, the content of it will vary both within and between cultures.

In a related vein, Hendry and Kloep (2007*a*) state that one cannot simply invent a new life stage. This statement is problematic for two reasons. First, as discussed earlier, age-stages are mostly arbitrary, leaving room for new ones to be invented and old ones discarded. Second, this view is historically myopic. Indeed, many have argued that adolescence, as it is understood in contemporary industrialized societies, was invented around end of the 19th century—very recently in phylogenetic terms. Like emerging adulthood, the emergence of adolescence has been linked to industrialization: namely, more restrictive child labor laws and the establishment of compulsory schooling. As Schlegel and Barry (1991) argue, the links to economic development are not adequate to explain the apparent universal presence of adolescents. However, it can help explain some of the cultural variations in adolescence around the world.

It is also important to note that the definition of adolescence has changed over time, highlighting the fluidity and social dependency of age-stages. Hall (1904) defined adolescence as ages 14–24. These ages may seem arbitrary and strange to the 21st-century reader, but they made sense at Hall's time: 14 was the average age of puberty and 24 was the average age of marriage. Indeed, adolescence has always been defined as beginning in biology and ending in culture. The problem is that both biology and culture change over time. Pubertal timing has been decreasing steadily since Hall's time, bringing the onset of adolescence down with it. At the same time, compulsory school and legal ages of adulthood have provided a fixed ending point for adolescence. Thus, the common age definition of adolescence ends up being 10–18. This definition is rather different from Hall's 14–24, and bears no resemblance to anything that has come before it. Thus, over the past 100 years, a new life stage has most certainly evolved.

The variation in the timing of adolescence raises an important point for emerging adulthood. Although the average age of puberty is 10, the normative range is 2 years around that point estimate, so 8–12. For example, a 12-year-old boy who has not yet begun puberty is likely surrounded by a large number of friends and schoolmates who have begun puberty. Thus, although our 12-year-old is not yet an *adolescent*, he is occupying the socially defined period of *adolescence*.

Syed and Mitchell (2013) recently articulated the importance of making a distinction between *emerging adulthood* and *emerging adults. Emerging adulthood* is the label Arnett (2000) developed to describe a new stage of the life span, and it outlines the normative social and psychological conditions that define it. In contrast, *emerging adults* is the term for the people themselves—not the age-stage. Emerging adults (the people) occupy emerging adulthood (the period). This distinction is important because it highlights the interactions of the psychological and sociological levels of analysis within emerging-adulthood theory. As described earlier, there is little debate that the timing and meaning of adulthood has changed in many parts of the world. In other words, I would say that there is little debate about the sociological phenomenon of emerging adulthood.[3] However, there are many questions about emerging adults: namely, who is included and excluded from participating in emerging adulthood? As previously discussed, not enough is known to properly answer this question. What is important, however, is that even if some youth are identified as "not emerging adults," it does not follow that there is no emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood, as a sociological phenomenon, is a social and cultural *context* that must be navigated by young people who pass through it. In other words, even if an individual is not an emerging adult, he or she develops within the context of emerging adulthood, which would likely have implications for said

development. Unfortunately, these proposals have not been examined empirically.

So, is emerging adulthood a new life stage? In my discussion, I attempted to increasingly blur the lines between stage (discontinuous) approaches and process (continuous) approaches by highlighting variations within normative and meaningful structures (see also Arnett, 2011). Can we have it both ways? Pepper's (1942) seminal *World Hypotheses* suggests that we may not be able to but that the two approaches may not be as dissimilar as they seem. Pepper suggested that all scientific inquiry could be located through four nonreducible root metaphors: formism, mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. Hendry and Kloep (2007*a*) argue strongly for dynamic systems theory, which seeks understanding within complex, interdependent, and chaotic systems. In this way, they are invoking *contextualism*, the root metaphor that captures dynamic and idiosyncratic processes. In contrast, emerging adulthood, as a stage theory, flows from a *formistic* root metaphor, indicating that development can be isolated into well-defined and unique categories or forms.

On the one hand, contextualism and formism are opposites in terms of how they handle complexity—embracing it versus reducing it, respectively (Cooper, 1987). On the other, they are both dispersive theories in that they reject order and determinism, "take data as they come," and are fundamentally concerned with complex processes. This similarity in orientation can be seen in the fact that many theorists have used stage concepts, including Piagetian notions of assimilation and accommodation (e.g., Kunnen & Metz, 2015) or challenges as the driver of development (Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*) *while* advocating for dynamic systems (see also DeYoung, 2010, for a similar approach within personality psychology). Indeed, Hendry (2011) recently conceded that he and Arnett mostly agree on the underlying psychological processes that are occurring and that his main point of contention was the age-stage label. This discussion of root metaphor and theory now assumes that emerging adulthood is indeed a theory. In the next section, I take a much closer look at whether that is the case.

What Is Theory? Is Emerging Adulthood a Theory?

Is emerging adulthood truly a *theory*? To address this question, we must first back up a bit and ask a broader question: *what is a theory?* As it happens, for several reasons, this not such a simple question to address.

First, the definition and purpose of *theory* is disciplinary. Iser (2006) draws a clear distinction between scientific theory and humanistic theory.[4] In general, scientific theories are oriented toward making predictions that will ultimately lead to the development of laws. In contrast, humanistic theories are oriented toward developing greater understandings, with the ultimate goal of developing a functional metaphor that represents the phenomenon. Scientific theories are discarded through the process of falsification, whereas humanistic theories are discarded because scholars are no longer interested in using them.

All theories emphasize explanation. The fundamental difference between scientific and humanistic theories, from which all other differences follow, is how explanation is conceptualized and what it leads to. Scientific theories are meant to generate predictions, whereas humanistic theories are meant to develop understandings and have little, if any, interest in prediction. Another way to think about this distinction in the use of theory is to use language that should be familiar to most researchers in the social sciences: *deductive* and *inductive* inference.

Deductive inference is a top-down process wherein a set of propositions (e.g., data, speculation) is used to develop a testable hypothesis. The results of the test are evaluated in terms of the degree to which they are consistent with the hypothesis. Prediction plays a critical role in deductive inference because the nature of the prediction that is made by the researcher dictates the type of data that are collected. The origins of the prediction are of little consequence so long as the data are proper tests of the hypothesis (Popper, 1959).

Inductive inference, in contrast, is a bottom-up process wherein data are gathered and subsequently organized into a coherent system. Prediction does not play a role at all in inductive inference because that is simply not a goal of the approach. Observations are collected in order to develop a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, as with humanistic theories, the goal of inductive inference is *understanding*, not prediction. From a postpositivistic scientific perspective, there are clear limits to inductive inference, most notably that theories developed inductively rely on verifiability and have not been subject to falsifiability (Popper, 1959).

In what is perhaps a reflection of psychology's position within the so-called hierarchy of science (Fanelli, 2010; Simonton, 2006), psychological

research makes use of a curious combination of these two ways of doing theory (Meehl, 1990). Indeed, this metatheoretical diversity is what underlies one of the most contentious and ongoing debates among psychological researchers: the question of quantitative and qualitative methods (Lyons, 2009). Many researchers do not have a conscious awareness of this alignment and thus fail to realize that they are arguing about approaches that are, in fact, complementary. But all of that is a topic for a different chapter. What I am concerned with here is how, no matter if a theory was developed deductively or inductively, most psychological researchers want to have certain shared qualities that make the theory *useful*.

Usefulness is a concept that has been long prized in the social sciences. Take, for example, two oft-cited dictums (paraphrased): *there is nothing so practical as a good theory* (Lewin, 1951) and *all models are wrong, but some are useful* (Box, 1976). But how do we determine if a theory is useful? The usefulness of a theory should ultimately be judged by the degree to which it can inform why elements of a system are interrelated. In doing so, it should have five key features (Gelso, 1996): descriptive, delimiting, generative, integrative, parsimonious. I discuss each of these in turn.

A theory must be *descriptive*, with strong understanding of the phenomenon in question. The description should be deep enough to allow for explanation, which is the true goal of comprehensive descriptiveness. Although explanation is the desired end state, description is highlighted because it is only through describing the psychological phenomenon that explanations can be developed. Furthermore, explanation is best understood as the product of all five qualities of theories described here because it is the basis for prediction (science) or understanding (humanities).

A theory must also be *delimiting* in that the terrain that is and is not covered by the theory should be clear. Delimiting a theory sets the boundaries on what falls under the purview of the theory, with clear boundaries leading to stronger predictions and less frequent overextensions. As I have written elsewhere (Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011), stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) is a highly visible example of a theory that has been overextended. Using a theory to generate hypotheses that are outside the scope of the theory leads to a murky cumulative record and ultimately compromises the utility of the theory.

Related to the principle of usefulness, a theory should be *generative* in that it inspires subsequent research. A useful theory is one that is subsequently adopted by other researchers and evaluated extensively, thereby refining the original theory. A theory that does not generate further scholarly work is not particularly useful.

A critical aspect of theories is that they are *integrative* in that they pull many different pieces of information together into a coherent system. Ideally, this integration includes laws, principles, and the results of tested hypotheses, as well as other observations and intuitions. In critiquing Markus and Kitayama's (1991) theory of independent and interdependent self-construals, Matsumoto (1999) noted that one of the reasons for its widespread adoption is that it appeared to account for an enormous amount of data. That is, it integrated a variety of disparate findings in the areas of cognition, emotions, and behaviors into a simple model with strong face validity.

Finally, the integrativeness of a theory should be balanced out with *parsimony*. That is, a theory should include only those postulations that are required for its usefulness and nothing more. Following Occam's Razor, when two accounts have equal predictive power, the simpler one should always be adopted. This approach dovetails with the modeling revolution in data analysis (Rodgers, 2010), in which analysts seek to develop the simplest possible model that can account for the greatest amount of the original variance. A useful theory is one that finds an optimal balance between integrativeness and parsimony.

Descriptive, delimiting, generative, integrative, parsimonious. These five features of a good theory are, of course, interrelated. As just discussed, a theory's integrativeness must be considered in relation to how parsimonious it is. Additionally, a theory is only likely to generate further research if there is a sufficient amount of descriptive data that outlines what the theory actually is and is sufficiently delimited so that others know to whom, what, and when the theory pertains. Moreover, these five features are not the only dimensions through which a theory might be evaluated. Nevertheless, they provide a useful heuristic for taking a deeper and more systematic look at whether an ostensible social science "theory" is in fact what it claims to be.

Part of the sloppiness among the use of the term "theory" is because, in general, psychological theories are quite weak (LeBel & Peters, 2011) and have

very few of the features just described. Additionally, the distinction between theory and hypothesis is not always clear. Theories are abstract, general, and generative. Hypotheses are concrete, specific, and testable. Theories should be used to generate hypotheses to be tested, the results of which then lead to a modification of theory.

The use of theory is also not uniform across disciplines of psychology. Social psychology, for example, relies on myriad micro-theories that often bear more resemblance to hypotheses (see Van Lange, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2011). In contrast, developmental psychology is dominated by a few old grand theories, such as Piaget's (1970) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories of cognitive development, and psychoanalytic theory and its derivatives (e.g., identity theory [Erikson, 1968]; attachment theory [Bowlby, 1969]). Personality psychology, with its heavy reliance on trait taxonomies, is mostly atheoretical (DeYoung, 2010). At the same time, there are other organizing systems that are called theories but that do not suggest any testable predictions. These include Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, McAdams's (2013) three levels of personality, and intersectionality (Cole, 2009). These models are best conceptualized as *frameworks* that can serve as structures for housing different theories (see Syed, 2010). The point of all of this is that establishing what is and is not a theory is not a straightforward task. Given this somewhat lengthy treatment of what theory is, we can now properly turn to the question at hand: *is emerging adulthood a theory?* To do so, we must consider emerging adulthood in terms of the five aspects of theory.

Is It Descriptive?

The degree to which emerging adulthood is descriptive is an interesting topic, one that has featured prominently in the debate (Arnett, 2007a; Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*). The debate, however, has not been about whether or not emerging adulthood *is* descriptive. Instead, the fact that it is descriptive has been used as the basis for the argument that it is not a theory. For example:

> A theory needs to be more than a description of characteristics and behaviours of particular (relatively privileged?) groups in relatively wealthy Western societies . . . . the construct of emerging adulthood is a description and does not especially advance our knowledge and understanding of human development. (Hendry, 2009, pp. 1–2)

Indeed, emerging adulthood is largely a collection of characteristics and behaviors of the populations that have been observed. It describes what emerging adults do, what they think, how they feel, and so on. In making his point, however, Hendry (2009) seemingly derides description, rather than seeing it as a necessary component of a theory and the route toward explanation. Hendry (2009) also states, "Age, like other structural variables such as gender, social class, or ethnicity, may *predict*, but does not *explain*, developmental phenomena" (p. 2; emphasis added).

Taking these comments together, Hendry appears to have put his theoretical cart before the horse. Scientific research involves five steps that, to be successful, must occur in a particular order: observation, description, explanation, prediction, and control. Engaging in any of these steps before having a firm footing on the previous ones will almost guarantee failure. As an obvious example, it is mighty difficult to describe something that one has not yet observed. Description is critical to the development of any theory. Without description, there can be no explanation. It is obviously a matter of opinion, but I would argue that most psychological theories—or even social science theories—sit at the interface of description and explanation. We are very good at description, but this has yet to translate into solid and consistent explanation. So where does emerging adulthood fit in? I agree with Hendry that is almost entirely descriptive. My point of departure, however, is that I view that as a good thing (at least for now).

Is It Delimiting?

Despite what some of the critics have asserted, Arnett (2000) was clear from the beginning that emerging adulthood was not to be considered a universal life stage: "Is emerging adulthood a period of life that is restricted to certain cultures and certain times? The answer to this question appears to be *yes*" (Arnett, 2000, p. 477; emphasis in original). He goes on, "emerging adulthood would be most likely to be found in countries that are highly industrialized or postindustrial" (p. 478). Thus, the theory of emerging adulthood in its original form contained some boundary conditions (Arnett, 2011).

Nevertheless, delimiting the theory has been one of the major foci of its critics. In particular, some have asserted that, even within highly industrialized societies, it is only the privileged young people who "get" to experience it. Here, privilege is typically defined in terms of race/ethnicity, social class,

and educational attainment. Despite the reasonable criticisms, there have been few careful analyses to demonstrate that certain sectors of the populations are shut out from emerging adulthood (Arnett & Tanner, 2011). Syed and Mitchell (2013) took up the task of reviewing the literature on race, ethnicity, and emerging adulthood and, not surprisingly, concluded that the degree to which emerging adulthood generalizes across ethnic and racial lines is complicated and depends on a number of factors. The findings of the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults (Arnett & Schwab, 2012; Arnett & Walker, 2014), a survey of more than 1,000 emerging adults across the United States, suggested that there were few differences in endorsement of emerging-adulthood criteria across social classes (defined as mother's educational attainment). Emerging adults whose mothers' educational attainment was high school or less reported having greater financial challenges to fund the education they desired, viewed their lives as less fun and exciting, and reported greater depressive symptoms. At the same time, they were more positive about their futures and were more likely to report that they expect their lives to be better than those of their parents.

As discussed previously, it is important to not conflate social class with participation in higher education. Like direct comparison by social class, there are relatively few direct comparisons between college and non-college goers. Hendry and Kloep (2010) provided an analysis of heterogeneity of emerging adulthood among those who were not in college, but they did not include a college-going comparison group. In contrast, a recent analysis compared four groups of emerging adults: traditional college students at a 4-year university, first-generation college students (i.e., first in their family to attend college), technical college students, and non-students (Mitchell, Syed, McLean, & Wood, 2013). The findings indicated that there were differences among the four groups but they were not widespread, primarily in terms of self-focus, other-focus, and possibilities. Based on the findings, Mitchell et al. suggested that emerging adulthood should be considered as a continuous range, a matter of degree, rather than either/or.

In general, there has been a degree of delimitation to the theory of emerging adulthood, but there is a pressing need for much more research on this topic. Despite the diversity of Arnett's (2004) original sample, the majority of research on emerging adulthood has been conducted with college students, and therefore the claim that it does not generalize to non-college populations has been assertion rather than based on data. The truth is, we do not really know either way.

Is It Generative?

This may be emerging adulthood's strongest footing as a theory. As Arnett and Tanner (2011) noted, Arnett's 2000 *American Psychologist* article had been cited more than 1,700 times as of September 2010. Four and a half years later (May 2015), the number of citations is more than 5,500 (according to Google Scholar). There is now a Conference on Emerging Adulthood that held its 7th biennial meeting in 2015, the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood officially launched in 2011 and has more than 400 members worldwide, and, in 2013, the new journal *Emerging Adulthood* was launched as the flagship journal of the society and is poised to become the premier outlet of scholarship pertaining to the third decade of life. Thus, there is little doubt that the theory of emerging adulthood has been generative. As Arnett and Tanner (2011) remark, "The key question for any theory should be, does it inspire, new knowledge and research? . . . For emerging adulthood, the answer is unequivocally yes" (p. 124). Although I agree with the conclusion, I disagree that generativity is the *key question*. It is, rather, one question among many that must be examined.

Is It Integrative?

Emerging adulthood does integrate a number of different observations on historical, social, and individual levels. The conditions for emerging adulthood are located in economic (shift to services, information, and technology) and societal (compulsory schooling, birth control) changes. The five features themselves represent the different aspects of youth's lives that have been pulled together. *Instability* covers frequent changes in several domains, particularly where people live, the jobs they hold, and their romantic relationships. *Possibilities* capture an affective orientation toward the future. *Self-focus* highlights how emerging adults establish priorities in their busy lives. *Feeling in-between* signifies how they think about the meaning of adulthood. Finally, *identity exploration*, the grand feature, represents a broad tendency to view the present as unsettled, developing, and emerging. Thus, it would seem that emerging adulthood integrates a broad variety of observations.

Is It Parsimonious?

The degree to which emerging adulthood is appropriately parsimonious is difficult to judge. It may depend on what aspect of emerging adulthood is being considered. On the one hand, a theory of development that is meant to capture the experiences of a large portion of the world is extremely parsimonious—perhaps too much, as some have suggested (Hendry & Kloep, 2007*a*). As described previously, however, parsimony must be understood in the context of the information that it is trying to integrate. Emerging adulthood is, in fact, much more than just a label applied to an age-stage. Indeed, there are psychological experiences that undergird it. Whereas the five features have face validity, it is unclear just how necessary they all are to the theory. For example, it could be that identity exploration serves as the broader psychological construct that accounts for the instability and possibilities. That is, are they simply behavioral and affective manifestations, respectively, of the identity development process? These are the types of questions that have not yet been directly evaluated.

So, Is It a Theory?

As should be clear from the preceding discussion, answering the question of whether or not emerging adulthood is a theory is not an easy task. It certainly is strong in some aspects; namely, generativity and integrativeness. Other aspects are more questionable, such as delimiting and parsimonious. It is descriptive, but not comprehensively enough so that we are very close to having reasonable explanations for what has been observed. Indeed, age has served as the primary explanation for emerging adulthood (Arnett et al., 2011). Age, like other demographic constructs (e.g., ethnicity, gender), has little to no explanatory power but serves as a proxy for other, more dynamic processes. What are these processes for emerging adulthood? The five features? At this point, the answers to these questions are not well known, and investigating them will be critical to understanding the theory of emerging adulthood.

So, is emerging adulthood a theory? In the debates between Arnett and Hendry, the two (and colleagues) argued about its theoretical merits using different criteria—generativity and description/explanation, respectively. As it turns out, for the most part, they are both correct. Emerging adulthood has been incredibly generative, but it does not have a lot of explanatory power. Thus, I would say that it is a theory in development—emerging perhaps—but that much more work needs to be done.

Rejoinder: But Is It Nonsense?

Nonsense seems a bit harsh, but as noted at the outset of this chapter, I am not exactly an impartial observer. Despite my strong involvement with the emerging adulthood enterprise, my mission has not been to bolster emerging adulthood but rather to take a deeper look at some of the criticisms that have been made as assertions of fact. My colleagues and I have approached that task both conceptually (Syed & Mitchell, 2013) and empirically (Mitchell et al., 2013). The results of these analyses suggest that statements such as "emerging adulthood does not apply to X" are both unhelpful and unsupported. Indeed, yes/no evaluations of emerging adulthood are unlikely to be useful for the development (or dismissal) of the theory. Rather, questions of quality—for whom, under what conditions, and to what to degree—will assist with theoretical development, particularly concerning the boundary conditions of the theory. Arnett (2011) himself has increasingly endorsed this view, writing about the "many emerging adulthoods" that can be seen within and between cultures. It may be that emerging adulthood is "a description of characteristics and behaviours of particular (relatively privileged?) groups in relatively wealthy Western societies" (Hendry, 2009, p. 1), but I have yet to see any convincing data that support (or refute) such a claim.

Author's Note

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Notes

1. Curiously, despite it widespread use, this stage theory is not often referenced by name and is rarely discussed explicitly in the developmental literature.
2. Without veering too far off topic, schooling itself is based on cognitive and biological changes, such as the emergence of operational thinking around age 6 and pubertal onset. Schooling, however, is a more visible marker of these changes than are the underlying processes that led to the divisions in the first place. For this reason, schooling and

maturation are often confounded in societies with compulsory schooling.

3. There are, however, debates on how the changes occurred and what they mean for youth (e.g., Bynner, 2005; Côté, 2006).
4. Iser refers to scientific theories as "hard-core" and humanistic theories as "soft." I intentionally avoid this language because it reinforces the existing hierarchy of hard science and soft science, which implies that rigor is a matter of quantity rather than quality.

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CHAPTER

3

Generational Perspectives on Emerging Adulthood: A Focus on Narcissism

Jacob A. Paulsen, Moin Syed, Kali H. Trzesniewski, *and* M. Brent Donnellan

Abstract

Sociologists, psychologists, and others in the social sciences generally agree that the nature of adulthood is different now from what it was 50 years ago. There is much less agreement, however, on what these changes mean for the psychological experience of emerging adults. There has been extensive discussion and debate in the academic literature and popular press about whether there have been generational changes in how young people view themselves and their place in society. This chapter explores the debate over the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood from a generational perspective, focusing on the construct of narcissism. The authors review past and current conceptualizations and measurements of narcissism, summarize the ongoing debate about the nature of young people today, discuss narcissism from a lifespan developmental perspective, and offer suggestions for future research. Throughout, the authors emphasize the historical context of narcissism and societal beliefs about young people more broadly and stress that a generational perspective must be considered alongside a developmental perspective (i.e., individual ontogenetic change) to provide a more nuanced understanding of emerging adulthood.

Key Words: emerging adulthood, narcissism, development, adulthood, personality

There is a long history of anxiety regarding the characteristics of young people and the attributes of the upcoming generation (Donnellan & Trzesniewski, 2009; Roberts, Edmonds, & Grijalva, 2010). Examples can be found in the popular magazine and newspaper articles lamenting the characteristics of the hippies in the 1960s and the flappers of the 1920s. But such concerns also date back to ancient Greece, considering how Aristotle characterized young people in *Rhetoric* Book II (see Chapter 12). He considered young people to think they know everything and to act rashly while being filled with confidence and hope. Beyond the eerie familiarity of generational laments is the recurrent theme that contemporary life is marred by seemingly drastic changes in technology and social norms that coalesce to undermine the character of the next generation. These accounts often suggest that the upcoming generation develops in contexts that are largely outside the reach of such traditional civilizing forces like families, schools, and religious organizations. Consider the concerns raised by psychologist G. Stanley Hall at the turn of 20th century: "There is not only arrest, but perversion, at every stage, and hoodlumism, juvenile crime, and secret vice [masturbation] seem not only increasing, but develop in earlier years in every civilized land. Modern life is hard, and in many respects increasingly so, on youth. Home, school, church, fail to recognize its nature and needs and, perhaps most of all, its perils" (1904, p. xiv). Thus it would seem that the "kids these days" refrain is one that each generation is likely to apply to subsequent generations.

But there is something different happening with today's youth in industrialized societies, at least in comparison to the middle of the 20th century. During that time, the nature and meaning of adulthood was largely defined by what sociologists

refer to as the "Big Five" traditional markers of adulthood: leaving home, finishing school, stable employment, marriage, and children (Settersten, 2011). If you ask young people today, however, they will rank these five criteria as relatively low in terms of what it means to be an adult (Arnett, 2004). These role-based markers have given way to psychological ones, particularly personal responsibility and financial independence (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). In proposing the *theory of emerging adulthood*, Arnett (2007, 2011) has argued that social and economic changes in industrialized societies have led to an extended period of the life span between adolescence and adulthood proper. During emerging adulthood, young people feel like adolescents in some respects, but feel like adults in other respects. This sense of "in-betweenness" imbues emerging adulthood with its own unique developmental characteristics, including self-focus, optimism about the future, and identity explorations in the areas of love, work, and ideology (cf., Erikson, 1968).

Although sociologists, psychologists, and others in the social sciences generally agree that the nature of adulthood is different now from what it was 50 years ago, there has been much less agreement about Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (see Syed, 2016, for a review of some of the controversies). There have been debates about whether this prolonged transition is good or bad for young people and society (e.g., Côté & Bynner, 2008) and the degree to which emerging adulthood is experienced among marginalized groups (e.g., Hendry & Kloep, 2007). More recently, there has been quite a bit of attention paid to the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood and whether that self-focus should be considered a positive or negative characteristic (see Arnett, 2013; Twenge, 2013*a*, 2013*b* for an exchange).

In this chapter, we explore the debate over the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood from a generational perspective. Our discussion is largely framed in terms of the construct of narcissism, given its prominence within the scholarly literature and popular media as a core aspect of modern young people. We begin with a discussion of the psychology of generational decline, emphasizing the historical tendency to view subsequent generations with skepticism or even derision. We then discuss narcissism in three broad sections: (1) conceptualization and measurement, (2) a summary of the ongoing debate about the nature of young people today, and (3) narcissism from a life span developmental perspective. We close by offering some ideas for future research on this topic. One of the critical aspects of our exposition is that it is insufficient to adopt a solely generational perspective when conceptualizing the behavior of young people. Rather, a generational perspective must be considered alongside a developmental perspective (i.e., individual ontogenetic change) to provide a more nuanced understanding of emerging adulthood. The need to consider both cohort (i.e., generational) changes *and* individual development has long been recognized within the field of developmental psychology (Baltes, 1987). However, not all researchers studying young people adopt a developmental perspective, and, as will be shown, there are limitations to adopting an exclusively generational approach.

The Psychology of Generational Decline

Many contemporary adults seem to believe that today's young people are unique in history and on a seemingly self-destructive path that threatens to undermine the future of contemporary society. At the least, this would be a reasonable conclusion drawn from popular media portrayals of the so-called Millennial or Generation Y cohorts. For example, today's youth have been accused of being self-centered, entitled, and unable to handle criticism. These accounts often suggest that they are addicted to empty praise, and they want everything given to them without having to earn it through hard work and perseverance (CBS News, 2008). Some sources seem to suggest that these youth are so socially coddled and emotionally immature that they cannot form lasting romantic relationships. For example, a recent *New York Times* article (Reiner, 2014) suggests that youth today are so lost when it comes to other people that they may never manage to get married and that colleges should start offering classes on love to help them find their way to a marriage partner.

It is not clear, however, how anyone could actually know whether today's youth are lost when it comes to marriage, given that the oldest members of this so-called generation are just barely 30 and Generation Y is postponing marriage until, on average, age 29 for men and 27 for women. It seems we are faced with a situation in which "they" are not following "our" rules and therefore they are doing it wrong. Worse, some of these accounts lack a long-term historical perspective regarding the timing of major life events like marriage (see Amato, 2011). When considering data from 1890 to 2007, the median age at marriage follows a somewhat U-shaped pattern, given that it was higher in 1890 than in the 1950s, when it reached a historical low

for the United States. In short, many popular discussions lack an appropriate perspective on generational changes.

To be sure, it can be difficult, if not simply impossible, to separate developmentally relevant attributes (e.g., characteristics and tendencies that many youth share) from cohort relevant attributes (e.g., characteristics and tendencies that all people of a particular birth year share) when forming impressions based on personal observations. After all, today's adults have not been able to observe multiple cohorts going through similar developmental periods while holding their own development constant. For example, one author (Boychuck, 2014) stated that this generation is unique because it is the first generation to grow up with school lockdown drills, but previous generations had to regularly practice safety drills in school to prepare for nuclear attacks from the USSR. This suggests to us that some social commentators might rely on anecdotes and impressions when forming opinions about this generation rather than adopting a psychologically and historically informed perspective on cultural changes that spans more than 10 or so years.

Moreover, impressions may not accurately track reality. For instance, it is well known in criminology that violent crime rates dropped in the 1990s and 2000s (see, e.g., LaFree, 1999; Pinker, 2011), but perceptions of the violent crime rate have not tracked these trends. Consider that 66% of Americans in 2010 believed that there was more crime in the United States in 2010 versus 1 year ago, according to a Gallup public opinion poll (Gallup, 2014), and 95% of participants that year indicated that crime was a somewhat serious (35%), very serious (39%), or extremely serious problem (21%). There is an apparent disconnect between societal changes in crime and violence and perceptions of these changes. It is an intriguing psychological puzzle as to why many adults seem to view the world as getting darker and more dangerous, whereas some of the objective evidence about crime and criminal victimization would seem to contraindicate such pessimistic views.

Indeed, the familiarity of claims about generational decline throughout history begs for an explanation. One possible explanation offered by Eibach, Libby, and Gilovich (2003) is that adults mistake changes in their own lives for changes in the world. Research on adult personality development indicates that individuals develop throughout the life span, often in positive directions, such as increasing in self-control and emotional stability (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). However, individuals may not always keep these developmental changes in mind when evaluating their environment and members of younger cohorts. For example, the typical 40-year-old may compare her- or himself to a typical 20-year-old and observe psychological differences. The possible attributional bias is to assume that 20-year-olds are different because of historical factors rather than developmental factors.

Eibach and colleagues have illustrated the impact of this bias by showing, for example, that becoming a parent is associated with perceptions of increasing danger, presumably because parents are focused on keeping their child safe. The idea is that a new parent's priorities have changed such that they are sensitive to issues that were otherwise ignored or diminished before assuming the parental role. Indeed, their subsequent research found that priming the role of parent produced greater vigilance (Eibach & Mock, 2011), and parents tended to make moral judgments about offensive but harmless acts, such as body modification and the use of pornography, as compared to non-parents (Eibach, Libby, & Ehrlinger, 2009). This research supports the conclusion that developmental processes may impact judgments about the world and the youth of today in ways that would foster a belief in generational decline. The goals and behavior of young people are different from adults who are fully ensconced in the roles of worker, committed partner, and parent. But perhaps this gap between the general attributes of fully adult members of a society and younger people has been true for much longer than the past 30 or so years. It might even be the case that today's youth will develop and mature, and they themselves will end up lamenting the decline of a next generation of young people.

In light of possible attributional biases regarding the attributes of young people, it is useful to critically evaluate claims about them. One noteworthy trend has been the attribution of the psychological construct of *narcissism* to today's young people, especially emerging adults. Although there are a wide range of variables of interest to researchers, scholars, students, and the general public, there has been a fixation on narcissism when discussing the attributes of today's young people. Thus, narcissism is a particular focus of this chapter, although our general arguments and reservations could apply to a number of attributes. We begin by providing some background and context on narcissism as it is currently understood in the psychological sciences and related disciplines.

Conceptualizations of Narcissism

A Note on Definition

We strive to use an inclusive definition of narcissism that is compatible with a number of perspectives in the literature, although this can be challenging given the ongoing controversies in the field (e.g., Ackerman et al., 2011; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). As it stands, the personality characteristics captured by the label of narcissism can be both vices and virtues, maladaptive and adaptive, and normal as well as pathological. Indeed, there are a number of paradoxes in the literature with respect to some of the correlates of narcissism, and some have found that moderate levels of narcissism are associated with positive adaptation (Hill & Lapsley, 2011). Therefore, it is important to provide a broad context for understanding narcissism.

Ancient Perspectives on Narcissism: The Tyrants of Greece and Rome

Many ancient myths and tales warn about the dangers of self-obsession. Although there are variations in the myth, by many accounts, the Greek hunter Narcissus (Νάρκισσος) was so physically beautiful and self-obsessed that he died on the bank of a river, fixated by the majesty of his own reflection in the water (see Caravaggio, 1597). Some accounts describe him as having perished simply due to unimaginable sorrow, whereas others suggest that Narcissus committed suicide. The ancient tale of Narcissus seems to be a warning about the dangers of an inflated sense of self and the destructive nature of self-obsession; the Ancient Greeks referred to this as *hubris* (ὕβρις), and the Romans as *superbia*. Both of those ancient terms carried a wide range of meaning within their cultural and temporal contexts. For example, the term "hubris" was used by ancients such as Plato, Demosthenes, and Aristotle to refer to an act of humiliation, wrongful insult, or excessive and abusive force against another autonomous human being, brought about by a sense of superiority, often associated with great wealth. For Aristotle, "the underlying motivation of hubristic behavior is the affirmation of one's superiority by disgracing or humiliating another person" (Cohen, 1991, p. 174). The Roman concept of *superbia* in some ways grew out of Greek *tyranophobia* (it occurs in Roman writing as far back as Cato the Elder, circa 167 BCE) and was used in Roman political invective for conveying a sense of haughty superiority, arrogant abusiveness, and wanton self-assertion (Dunkle, 1967). Thus, since the dawn of the Western literary tradition, and perhaps even before (Homer, 1990), there were concerns about the dangers of individuals who possessed an inflated sense of self characterized by excessive pride, anger, and hostility. The core idea was that the dynamics involved in narcissism involve inflicting harm to promote the self such that narcissism was harmful to society.

Modern Psychology and Narcissism

Concepts related to narcissism were critical to psychoanalytic approaches and have some influence over contemporary discussions. Freud (1925) distinguished between primary narcissism, which he asserted was present to a degree in every healthy human, and secondary narcissism, a quite extreme exaggeration and departure from normative, healthy, primary narcissism. Thus, Freud seems to have foreshadowed one of the contemporary areas of debate about narcissism involving distinctions between normal and pathological processes. Indeed, there appears to be some consensus with Freud's basic dichotomy of adaptive and maladaptive elements of self-regard and self-focused cognition and behavior. As with Freud's notion of primary narcissism, there is the idea that some narcissistic attributes and processes are present to some degree in all humans with only extreme and maladaptive manifestations considered to be pathological (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010).

Beyond this basic insight and perhaps common ground, there are significant areas of disagreement about the differences between normal narcissism and pathological narcissism. For instance, some suggest that adaptive and maladaptive narcissism lie on a single continuum, with healthy and disordered forms at opposing ends, whereas others conceptualize adaptive and maladaptive narcissism as distinct dimensions of personality (see Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010, for more detailed descriptions). Beyond the simple recognition that the broad construct of narcissism involves both normal and pathological expressions, there is far less consensus in the field. This makes it challenging to provide uncontroversial definitions of normal and pathological narcissism. Thus, we must acknowledge that not all theorists will agree with the following perspectives.

Normal or adaptive narcissism can be conceptualized as the tendency toward positive evaluations and expectations of the self, ambition, expression of interpersonal dominance, low avoidance motivation, creativity, minimal attention to stimuli that are inconsistent with a positive self-image, expressions of confidence, and even empathy (see, e.g.,

Cramer, 2011, p. 19). On the other hand, pathological narcissism is often conceptualized as a tendency to become significantly distressed when threats to positive self-images are presented and often involves significant self-regulatory deficits. These deficits often lead to dysfunctional and problematic coping strategies such as aggressive and hostile behavior or self-injurious behavior.

Paulhus (2001) provided a conceptualization of narcissism within a Big Five personality traits framework (Costa & McCrae, 1995; Goldberg, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999), suggesting that narcissism is manifested as high extraversion and low agreeableness. Paulhus (2001) cites evidence in support of this conceptualization, namely that Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) scores have been found to positively correlate with extraversion and negatively with agreeableness. Thus, when couched in a framework for normal personality traits, summary scores on the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988) manifest as a sort of disagreeable extraversion (see also Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Emmons, 1984; Hart et al., 2011; Miller & Campbell, 2008). Given that extraversion often has positive correlations with attributes like well-being and self-esteem, it is not surprising that a measure that overlaps with extraversion will have positive correlates. This overlap between summary NPI scores and adaptation contributes to some confusion in the literature and raises important points about the connection between self-esteem and narcissism. However, it is generally accepted that self-esteem and narcissism are distinct constructs. Paulhus (2001) notes that "a crude way of describing the difference is that narcissists' relationships are characterized by an *asymmetric* positive view of the self and a negative view of others whereas relationships among those with high self-esteem are characterized by a *symmetric* positive view of both self and other" (p. 229).

Narcissism as Psychopathology

The psychological trait of narcissism, approaching its maladaptive capacity, connotes an inflated sense of self, intelligence, and attractiveness, along with feelings of entitlement, grandiosity, personal agency, and dominance, and it is associated with significantly heightened extraversion and a low level of agreeableness (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Campbell et al., 2002; Emmons, 1984; Hart et al., 2011; Miller & Campbell, 2008). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) category of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) describes individuals qualifying for this diagnosis as displaying a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, an inflated sense of self-importance, a sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, interpersonal exploitation (i.e., nefarious coercion of others), and excessive arrogance, among other phenomena. As noted previously, adaptive narcissism is conversely characterized by confidence, positive self-views, concern for others, and other positive traits (Cramer, 2011).

Campbell and Baumeister (2006) outline a model of maladaptive narcissism containing three elements: inflated self-views, lack of warmth or empathy, and self-regulatory strategies for maintaining inflated self-views. The DSM-5 (APA, 2013) criteria for NPD appear quite congruent with the model described by Campbell and Baumeister (2006) because they include criteria such as exaggeration of personal achievements, a sense of superiority without commensurate achievements, interpersonal exploitation, lack of empathy, sense of entitlement, and the like.

So, where does modern psychology draw the line between normal, adaptive narcissism and psychopathology? A quote from Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) offers some insight:

> All individuals have normal narcissistic needs and motives . . . however, pathologically narcissistic individuals appear particularly troubled when faced with disappointments and threats to their positive self-image. Since no one is perfect and the world is constantly providing obstacles and challenges to desired outcomes, pathological narcissism involves significant regulatory deficits and maladaptive strategies to cope with disappointments and threats to a positive self-image. (p. 426)

Thus, although some consensus has been reached regarding normal and pathological narcissism, the lines between these constructs are somewhat blurred in the literature. This is an important issue for the field of psychology to resolve. Indeed, the presence of such debates makes it challenging to use terminology associated with narcissism to describe entire birth cohorts when the field struggles to define what exactly it means to be narcissistic and whether certain narcissistic tendencies are normal versus pathological. These definitional issues are also reflected in concerns about measurement, as we now discuss.

Measurement of Narcissism

The most widely used measure in basic research on narcissism in social and personality psychology

is the NPI (Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981). The main impetus for developing this measure of narcissism was the inclusion of NPD in DSM-III (APA, 1980; Raskin & Hall, 1979). The NPI was developed through item-level analysis of an initial 223-item survey that was administered to 71 students at a California university; the final product was an 80-item instrument that was divided into two groups of 40 items, which were called Form A and Form B. Raskin and Hall (1979) noted that the NPI was not meant to measure personality disorder; although they mentioned that individuals diagnosed with NPD may score high on the NPI, they also asserted that the NPI "should be regarded as a measure of the degree to which individuals differ in a trait we have labeled 'narcissism'" (p. 590).

The NPI was originally conceptualized as a relatively unidimensional measure of the trait of narcissism. However, the NPI was subsequently subjected to numerous factor analyses that seemed to generate different solutions. The conclusion is that the NPI seems to measure a number of constructs rather than a single dimension that can be said to meaningfully range from low to high (see Ackerman et al. 2011; Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009). For example, Emmons (1984) conducted a factor analysis of the measure and decided on four main themes: Exploitativeness/Entitlement, Leadership/Authority, Superiority/Arrogance, and Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration. Seven dimensions were reported by Raskin and Terry (1988): Authority, Exhibitionism, Superiority, Vanity, Exploitativeness, Entitlement, and Self-Sufficiency.

The debate over the factor structure of the NPI underscores our earlier discussion of the conceptual controversies associated with narcissism. Psychometric issues with the NPI, along with its widespread use, have contributed to some of these controversies. As it stands, an individual's single overall score on the NPI seems to reflect a mixture of adaptive and maladaptive content. Moreover, two people with the same total score might each have a different balance of adaptive and maladaptive attributes. This possibility has created some debate about the how to score the NPI and has even prompted some writers to argue that the NPI primarily measures adaptive, nonclinical aspects of narcissism (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010).

To be sure, the NPI has received significant criticism (see Brown et al., 2009; Arnett, Trzesniewski, & Donnellan, 2013). For instance, Brown et al. (2009) detail the complexity of the narcissism construct and suggest that a composite "total narcissism" score, computed by summing across NPI items, may be meaningless, akin to summing across Big Five scales to create a "total personality" score. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2009) report that the NPI may be heavily confounded with simple self-esteem and that seemingly contradictory findings of studies using the NPI may be the result of misguided measurement practices. For example, grandiosity and entitlement are two of the key dimensions of narcissism, yet they are only modestly correlated with one another and differentially correlated with distress and well-being (Brown et al., 2009). These findings, among others, led the authors to suggest the possibility of abandoning the broad construct of narcissism in favor of a sustained focus on its subdimensions. Yet others have cautioned against replacing the NPI with lower-order scales of entitlement and grandiosity, noting value in using the full scale in addition to the lower-order scales (Miller, Price, & Campbell, 2012). Although the NPI is a sometimes controversial instrument, there are some areas of consensus. If entitlement and grandiosity are critical elements of narcissism, then the NPI can be considered to have some validity because it has content related to these domains. Likewise, a large number of studies have used the NPI, and there are a number of robust correlates with the total score that associate it with negative interpersonal consequences such as aggression. In short, researchers know a lot about the correlates of the summary scores on the NPI, but it is unclear how much this information provides clarity about the broader construct of narcissism, given concerns about construct contamination with the total score.

Indeed, narcissism is a complex construct with connections to a host of negative vocational, social, and personal outcomes. For instance, NPD is associated with impaired vocational functioning, social isolation and withdrawal, depressed mood, and anorexia nervosa, as well as substance-related disorders (APA, 2000, 2013). Baumeister et al. (2000) reported on a series of studies investigating the nuances of interrelations between self-esteem and narcissism. They reported that level of self-esteem, in and of itself, was not a significant predictor of heightened aggression, nor was level of self-esteem in combination with subjects receiving insults. However, narcissism, when combined with insulting provocation, was associated with increased aggressive behavior. Baumeister et al. (2000) also reported that, in their sample of prisoners, high levels of narcissism appeared to be a major cause

of aggression and that "narcissism has taken center stage as the form of self-regard most closely associated with violence" (p. 27). Using a sample of undergraduate students (N = 3,143), Donnellan et al. (2005) found narcissism to be significantly correlated with heightened aggressive behavior but, contrary to the previous findings of Baumeister et al. (2000), also reported an association between heightened aggressive behavior and low self-esteem. These findings suggest that narcissism is a quite complex construct and not merely the high end of a self-esteem spectrum.

Accordingly, evidence of increasing levels of narcissism over time in a society would be sufficient cause for alarm. Indeed, some researchers claim to have profound evidence of a steady increase in narcissism among youth across recent decades (e.g., Twenge, 2006; Twenge & Foster, 2008*c*; Twenge et al., 2008*e*). The main assertion is that the current generation of emerging adults is seemingly one of the most narcissistic cohorts. However, as with the construct of narcissism itself, there are controversies and debates over this conclusion (e.g., Arnett, 2013; Trzesniewski et al., 2008*a*, 2008*b*). Some of the themes in the debate touch on psychometric issues with the NPI and relate to issues about the interpretation of time trends. A full and unbiased accounting of the debate is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, we provide a broad outline in the next section.

Narcissism and Emerging Adulthood: Generation Me or Generation We?

There has been a significant discussion about whether levels of narcissistic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors have increased in people, especially emerging adults, over time. The "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2006, 2013*a*, 2013*b*) side of the debate has offered evidence that young people are indeed becoming more narcissistic, whereas critics of this perspective have challenged the strength and pervasiveness of the evidence (Arnett, 2013; Arnett et al., 2013; Trzesniewski et al., 2008*a*, 2008*b*). The Generation Me side of the debate contends that narcissism has increased across recent generational cohorts, psychopathology generally has increased across recent generational cohorts, and that there has been a shift in the value systems and motivational patterns across recent generations of young people (i.e., a shift from internal toward external motivation). The "Generation We" side of this debate contends that some of these trends have been overstated and that the negative tone of this characterization risks unfairly stereotyping a whole generation of young people.

Evidence for Changes in Narcissism Over Time

Jean Twenge is a central academic figure advancing the perspective that the youth of today are becoming increasingly narcissistic. She has published widely and coined the term "Generation Me," which refers to people born in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Twenge, 2006, 2008*a*). In addition to generational increases in narcissism, Twenge and colleagues have published findings asserting increases in positive self-views (Twenge & Campbell, 2008*b*), declines in concern for the environment and civic orientation (e.g., interest in politics and social issues; Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012), large increases in psychopathology (Twenge et al., 2010*b*), changing vocational values (e.g., an increase in leisure interest and extrinsic goal orientation; Twenge & Campbell, 2008*a*; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010*a*), and a changing academic orientation across recent generations (Twenge, 2009).

In an effort to find out if narcissism has been rising across recent generations, Twenge et al. (2008*e*) conducted a cross-temporal meta-analysis using 85 samples of American college students (N = 16,475) who had all completed the NPI between 1979 and 2006. Twenge et al. (2008*e*) compared data from college student samples that were drawn at different points in time. Age was relatively constant, whereas the date of data collection varied, allowing comparison across students from different birth cohorts. Thus, the correlation between each sample mean and the year that the sample was collected is computed to give a sense of generational trends. This general method is referred to as *cross-temporal meta-analysis*. Using this method, Twenge et al. (2008*e*) reported a significant association between year of data collection and mean NPI score (β = .53), noting that this effect translates into an approximately .33 standard deviation increase in narcissism scores between 1982 and 2006.

In an effort to investigate claims of increasing narcissism, Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) analyzed NPI scores from 25,849 students between the ages of 18 and 24 that were sampled from the University of California Davis and Berkeley campuses in 1996, and over the period of 2002–2007 (i.e., the years for which relevant data were available). Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) reported finding little compelling

evidence of a notable relation between year of data collection and NPI score (r = .01). Furthermore, Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) assert that, "contrary to previous research and media reports, this study yielded no evidence that levels of narcissism have increased since Raskin and Terry (1988) first published their 40-item forced-choice version of the NPI" (p. 184). In a separate report, Trzesniewski et al. (2008*b*) raise concerns with respect to drawing conclusions about populations from samples of convenience (e.g., applying a label to an entire generation of people based on data collected from select college undergraduates; see also Arnett et al., 2013), as well as possible complications in interpreting NPI scores.

Twenge et al. (2008*d*) responded by focusing on seven samples that had been drawn from universities in California in their meta-analytic database to see if there was something unique about students from this state. The aggregated data from 2,625 college students in California revealed no significant change in narcissism over time. Twenge et al. (2008*d*) pointed out that there was significant change between 1988 and 2006 when examining samples drawn from 27 other universities across the United States, and, for those 27 other universities, they report an effect size of d = 0.41 over a 24-year period. Thus, there was the possibility that samples from California were obscuring a robust time trend.

This raised an interesting question: why would there be a difference between samples drawn from universities in California and samples drawn from other US universities over the years in question? Twenge et al. (2008*d*) offered a hypothesis. They noted that "California passed Proposition 209, prohibiting UC campuses from using race or ethnicity as a factor in admissions. This decreased the number of Black and Hispanic students and increased the number of Asian-American students" (p. 921). The report goes on to mention that between 1983 and 2007 Asian-American enrollment at UC Berkeley went from 27% to 47%, a substantial increase. Indeed, the Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) article notes that their sample was 39.7% Asian American. Twenge et al. (2008*d*) hypothesized that this significant demographic shift at California universities could explain the seemingly discrepant findings with respect to change over time on narcissism scores between college samples from California and those drawn from the rest of the United States. The basic idea is that Asian cultural values may de-emphasize individualism and thus depress the expression of narcissistic attributes. Thus, campuses that experience large demographic shifts over time might not be suitable for testing time trends in narcissism that might be evident for the broader population of the United States.

To test the hypothesis that shifting racial and ethnic compositions in California contributed significantly to Trzesniewski et al.'s (2008*a*) findings of no significant change in NPI scores as a function of time or age between 1996 and 2007, Twenge and Foster (2008*c*) reexamined the Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) data for which race/ethnicity data were available (i.e., 2002–2007) specifically to investigate within-ethnic-group change. Twenge and Foster (2008*c*) reported that, between 2002 and 2007, the NPI scores of white and Asian-American students both significantly increased, and that, as was expected, Asian-American students scored significantly lower in narcissism than did whites. Race/ethnicity data for periods prior to 2002 were not readily available to Twenge and Foster, so it was not possible for them to compare within-ethnic-group change in narcissism before that time. Twenge and Foster (2008*c*) concluded that the Trzesniewski et al. (2008*a*) data, as well as their own data, support the hypothesis that narcissism has significantly increased nationwide among college students from the 1980s through 2006, and that between 2002 and 2007 within-ethnic-group narcissism increased significantly among college students at UC Davis, but not narcissism in general (i.e., when examining all racial/ethnic groups as a whole). Additional points of debate focused on the general approach of the cross-temporal meta-analysis. Specifically, noteworthy problems with cross-temporal meta-analysis (see Twenge, 2000; Twenge & Campbell, 2001) were discussed and addressed by Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010).

In a cross-temporal meta-analysis, a correlation coefficient is computed between the year of data collection and the means of the samples that were collected. An implicit assumption is that the sample means being correlated with the year of data collection represent a group with a limited age range because the researcher wishes to examine generational cohort effects. A specific concern with analysis of this sort is that it relies on summary statistics such as group means instead of individual-level data to compute an aggregate correlation. These correlation coefficients are referred to as *ecological correlations* or *alerting correlations* and, as Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) note, "psychologists are often unaccustomed to accounting for variability in a construct at this level, and there is no guarantee that

relations found at this level will be the same—or even similar to—relations between individual scores and time of measurement" (p. 60). Indeed, when using individual scores for analyses, the standard deviation of the data points is often much greater than the standard deviation of the sample means used in cross-temporal meta-analyses. This can lead to differences between the size of ecological correlations and the size of correlations computed using individual-level data. A compounding problem is that researchers often do not have access to individual-level data when performing large cross-temporal meta-analyses and thus have no way to evaluate the difference between the two methods of analysis. Previous work has shown that switching between individual-level data and summary statistics can sometimes impact the strength of the observed correlation coefficient and even occasionally produce results with different signs at the individual and ecological level.

To explore the difference between individual and ecological effects, Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) used both methods, and compared the results. Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) examined data collected from samples of US high school seniors (N = 477,380) over a period of 30 years (1976–2006) and reported on change over time with respect to 31 outcome variables, all psychological constructs such as egotism, self-enhancement, individualism, locus of control, life satisfaction, antisocial behavior, and many others. Given the enormity of the sample size, Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) chose to focus on effect sizes to avoid overstating statistically significant, yet practically trivial, differences. When the data were examined at the individual level, out of the 31 variables under study, nine met criteria for consideration with a small effect size of .10 or more; none of the 31 variables exceeded a medium (defined by the authors) effect size of .25. The data suggest that youth of today are less fearful of social problems, such as conflict or war, more cynical and less trusting, and have higher educational expectations than previous generations. Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) therefore suggested that there was little evidence of dramatic differences across generations. However, when using the ecological method of analysis (i.e., using means instead of individual-level data points), correlations were much stronger: "the average difference [between the strength of the individual-level correlations and the ecological correlations] was .59 . . . and the difference was .50 or larger (in the r metric) for 22 out of the 31 comparisons" (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010, p. 69). Thus, the authors' results would have been different had the primary analyses been conducted at the ecological level.

Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) concluded that today's youth are no more egotistical and are just as happy and satisfied with life as generations of the recent past. Furthermore, they suggested that within-cohort variability exceeds the between-cohort variability, indicating that generalizations about generations may overlook important within-cohort differences in personality and adjustment. Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) make a compelling case that previous findings of significant change in narcissism and related constructs are perhaps exaggerated by the method of analysis (i.e., cross-temporal meta-analytic technique, ecological correlation coefficients). Nonetheless, this is a controversial issue, and future studies are needed to address these questions.

The State of the Debate

The first issue of a new journal, *Emerging Adulthood*, recently played host to an exchange between proponents of the Generation Me hypothesis (that narcissism is increasing over time) and those favoring a Generation We perspective (a contrary view that narcissism is not increasing as a function of time). Arnett (2013) claims that there are three main reasons to question Twenge's evidence: (1) the NPI is not an appropriate or accurate measure of narcissism, (2) too much of the data were drawn from college student samples, and (3) there is a body of contradictory literature suggesting little or no rise in narcissism. Arnett (2013) goes on to mention that Twenge's data cannot be considered to have been representative of "young Americans" (see Twenge, 2006) because, although many young Americans engage in higher education, approximately only 20% enroll at 4-year institutions, whence much of the relevant data have come. Arnett concludes that a bit of additional optimism and self-esteem during emerging adulthood may serve as a protective factor (i.e., adaptive narcissism) during a difficult life stage, rather than as a risk factor.

Twenge (2013*a*) asserts that high school and college students' values have been shifting over the years, putting more focus on extrinsic concerns (e.g., money, fame) and less on intrinsic concerns such as community and affiliation. She claims that this shift in focus has had negative consequences, such as a decrease over time, with respect to civic engagement, empathy, and concern for others, and

an increase in negative interpersonal outcomes. Twenge (2013*a*) cites literature that suggests a rise in psychopathology and a decrease in general well-being during the years in which she asserts that narcissism-related constructs have risen. Twenge (2013*a*) states that so-called Millennials (those born after approximately 1980) are more accepting of race, gender, and sexual orientation differences than other recent generational cohorts but that this does not necessarily mean that they are more empathic. Thus, she asserts that for many Millenials there is a seldom-traversed gap between accepting, tolerating, and respecting others as individuals and connecting with a deeper, truer sense of their experience.

Arnett et al. (2013) responds, noting that four out of five of Twenge's (2013*a*) datasets were drawn from samples of students at residential colleges, which is a group representing less than one-fourth of all emerging adults. Furthermore, they raise issues regarding psychometric shortcomings of the NPI, whereas Twenge (2013*b*) questions, "And is the NPI a 'dubious measure of narcissism?' Apparently not, as it is employed in 77% of studies of narcissistic traits," and notes that "The NPI is also the best self-report predictor of narcissistic traits derived from clinical interviews" (Twenge, 2013*b*, p. 22). Throughout the exchange, Twenge holds firm that narcissism is in fact on the rise in young people: "If young people were more narcissistic, we would expect seven outcomes: more materialism, more cheating, less emphasis on committed relationships, less empathy, more plastic surgery, more unrealistic expectations, and more crime" (Twenge, 2013*b*, p. 23). She asserts that six of these have occurred (crime is the one exception). In short, there appears to be sharp divisions on the issue of whether narcissism is increasing for today's emerging adults, and it is clear that additional research from outside groups would be constructive.

Narcissism Across the Life Span

When considering narcissism (or any other personality construct) in emerging adulthood from a generational perspective, it is important to also take into account other factors that contribute to personality differences between individuals. Cohort theories propose that social, historical, and cultural events of any given era may exert a systematic influence on personality development (e.g., Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1994; Nesselroade & Baltes, 1974; Roberts & Helson, 1997; Stewart & Healy, 1989). Development is often a key component of *cohort theories* in that it is thought that social, historical, and cultural impacts may vary depending on the age of an individual at the time of the significant event. This type of impact is different from a *period effect*, which would be an event that has an equal impact on all individuals, regardless of age. For example, we might hypothesize that Al-Qaeda's attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, increased patriotism for all Americans, regardless of age. If this were the case, then we would expect that the mean level of patriotism in 2002 would be higher than the mean level of patriotism in 1992, and we would expect that the mean-level difference between these two time points is equal for people of different ages (e.g., 18-year-olds in 2002 might have higher patriotism than 18-year-olds in 1992, and an equal difference might be found for 30-year-olds and 60-year-olds). In contrast, a cohort effect is thought to differentially impact individuals based on their age at the time of the event. For example, Rogler (2002) notes that the Great Depression differentially impacted people who were young adults at the time and people who were older adults, and this impact had a lasting effect on them as they aged. The two groups experienced the same sociocultural shift, but this resulted in different normative trajectories because of the age at exposure to the event. Finally, age trajectories are the result of developmental changes that impact a person's personality in a more or less similar fashion across cohorts. For example, as people age, they tend to become more mature (e.g., the maturity principle; see Caspi et al., 2005). These three factors (i.e., maturational changes, period effects, cohort effects) may be independent from each other or they may interact. Thus, a question for research on narcissism is whether differences found across time or age are due to cohort, period, or developmental effects or to some combination thereof.

If only a cohort effect were in play, then we would expect that the generation who were school-aged during the self-esteem movement (a purported instigator of the rise in narcissism) would have a different level and trajectory of narcissism (e.g., stable, high narcissism), whereas generations before and possibly after would have similar narcissism levels and trajectories compared to individuals who did not experience the self-esteem movement or were not school-aged during it. However, it might be the case that people of all ages have been impacted by the self-esteem movement (a period effect), in which case we might expect to see higher levels of narcissism for people of all ages and similar trajectories across birth cohorts. A maturational-only

explanation would be that all generations exhibit a similar trajectory as they age. A combination of these impacts could result in complicated developmental patterns, such as finding the same general trajectory across cohorts but differing slopes at various points for some cohorts resulting in the trajectories interweaving across cohorts. An example of this would be finding that a generation has lower narcissism than other cohorts for all ages except for emerging adulthood. Last, there could be no normative age trajectory for any cohort, resulting in the trajectories of generational cohorts intermingling in a complicated tangle. As we discuss, existing evidence suggests that this is not the case. Needless to say, studying narcissism across the life span while trying to tease apart cohort, period, and maturational effects is a daunting task because there are many complexities and many moving targets not easily controlled for by researchers. Yet, as complicated as this area of research is, significant progress has been made.

Considerable research in the field of narcissism has been focused on emerging adulthood, and much less work has been done to examine narcissism during other developmental periods. The extant body of research suggests that, in general, narcissism tends to decrease over time, particularly in later stages of life (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Roberts et al., 2010). There is a subtle irony here. Perhaps each generation of older adults looks upon youth and finds them to be excessively narcissistic, which, when compared to older adults, they are. But, this may be a case of each successive generation of older adults noticing the normative trend in the development of narcissism. Perhaps each generation gradually forgets what they were like when they were younger and comes to look on contemporary emerging adults as *excessively* narcissistic, when in fact they are quite *normally* narcissistic, given their developmental stage.

The fact that much research on narcissism has been cross-sectional in nature is problematic, mainly due to the fact that it is difficult to determine whether age-related differences in narcissism are a product of period effects, cohort effects, developmental effects, or a complicated mixture of these factors. Given that narcissism is considered a personality variable and that NPD has appeared in multiple versions of the DSM among a group of disorders characterized as being relatively stable by adulthood, it is logical to hypothesize that individuals would remain relatively consistent in their levels of general narcissism across portions of the life span. Yet, even with this relative degree of consistency, there is certain to be intraindividual change across the life span with respect to narcissism and narcissism-related variables (cf., Caspi et al., 2005). Some researchers have begun the endeavor of conducting longitudinal research on narcissism, as well as examining early life predictors of later narcissism, both adaptive and maladaptive variants (e.g., Cramer, 2011). Longitudinal research can help to reveal normative trends in the development of narcissism across the life span and also help to discover what factors predict development of both adaptive and maladaptive narcissism.

Early Life Narcissism: Predictors of Emerging Adulthood Narcissism

Studying the early development of narcissism requires identifying the age at which narcissism emerges and whether there are early precursors to narcissism. Although there is a relative paucity of empirical work with respect to the origin of adaptive narcissism or the etiology of maladaptive narcissism, clinical theorizing on the subject dates back to Freud. In his wake were *object relations* theorists such as Kohut and Kernberg, as well as *social learning* theorists such as Millon. All of these theorists offered accounts of the origins of narcissism. Despite differences in existing theories, there appears to be consensus that an individual's interactions with primary caregivers or parents play an important role in the development of subsequent narcissism (Horton et al., 2006; Horton, 2011).

The body of theory concerning the origin and development of narcissism is too vast to cover here, but we present a summary of a model that is theoretically integrative for the sake of illustration. Tracy et al. (2009) suggested that early childhood experiences of rejection and humiliation (shame) combined with parental demands for perfection (hubristic pride) lead to dissociated implicit and explicit senses of self-esteem and a defensive self-esteem and self-regulatory style. After enduring significant rejection, humiliation, and parental demands for perfection, "the child's positive and negative self-representations may become dissociated, so that a perfectionist view of the self can be maintained at an explicit level, with all negative self-images buried at an implicit level" (p. 2). This theory suggests that an implicit representation of the self as negative leaves the narcissistic individual incapable of distinguishing between *bad acts* or *bad events* and a *bad self*. This attribution style is thought to produce excessive shame because any

negative attribution of an act or event is essentially an assault on one's global sense of self. Thus, narcissistic self-enhancement is thought to be defensive in nature, serving to protect the individual from intense feelings of shame. On the other hand, the narcissist's explicit self becomes almost entirely positive, with the individual seemingly unable to distinguish between positive acts or events and a positive self (e.g., "I did well on this test because I am a superior person"). As the individual develops, a defensive self-regulatory style emerges by which shame is minimized by keeping negative self-representations implicit, and hubristic pride is maximized through continuous inflation of positive self-representations and evaluations of self-related attributes, abilities, and the like. This is thought to become a stable, enduring pattern that, by adulthood, leaves the narcissist with highly dissociated positive and negative self-representations and a reactive, defensive, and potentially hostile self-regulatory style aimed at minimizing feelings of shame and humiliation.

In sum, theoretical accounts suggest that narcissism stems from developmental processes rooted in early childhood experiences characterized by rejection, humiliation, and certain parenting processes. These developmental processes are thought to give rise to intraindividual systemic processes such as defensive and contingent self-esteem that create an unstable and vulnerable view of the self with a hostile and reactive system of defense mechanisms that tend to be interpersonally abrasive. A logical extension of extant theory, research on early precursors of narcissism has focused on personality traits and family dynamics as predictors of narcissism.

Two studies (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009; Cramer, 2011) have analyzed data collected as a part of the Block and Block (1980, 2005) longitudinal project. This longitudinal study included extensive assessment of a demographically diverse sample (beginning $N = 128$) of children from two nursery schools in California; assessments were administered at ages 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, 18, 23, and 32. The study had a low rate of attrition, with 104 participants assessed at age 23 and 94 at age 32. One feature that made the Block and Block (1980, 2005) project strong from a design perspective was that "at each age, participants were seen on multiple occasions, by multiple observers, and completed a wide variety of tasks" (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009, p. 572).

Carlson and Gjerde (2009) examined data from the participants in the Block and Block (1980, 2005) study during preschool and again at ages 14, 18, and 23. Participants were assessed at these ages with respect to personality, narcissism precursors (preschool), and narcissism indicators (ages 14, 18, and 23), as well as on intelligence at the age of 18. Of the five preschool narcissism precursors assessed in the study (interpersonal antagonism, inadequate impulse control, histrionic tendencies, high activity level, and center of attention; California Child Q-Sort scales), all of them exhibited a statistically significant positive linear relationship with narcissism at age 14 (r's ranged from .31 to .42), as well as a significant positive linear relationship with narcissism at age 18 (r's ranged from .23 to .28), and four of the five preschool narcissism precursors exhibited significant positive linear relationship with narcissism at age 23 (r's ranged from .21 to .28). Thus, preschool narcissism precursors were indeed significantly predictive of narcissism scores at ages 14, 18, and 23. It could be concluded that there does appear to be personality characteristics and behaviors that are observable as early as preschool that foreshadow narcissism during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Indeed, "prospective analyses indicated that adolescents and young adults with relatively high narcissism scores were characterized by a theoretically meaningful personality configuration as early as preschool" (Carlson & Gjerde, 2009, p. 574).

As illustrated in theories of the development of narcissism, parenting behaviors are thought to have a significant influence on a child's developing self-view. Thus, as an extension of existing theory on the emergence of narcissism, Cramer (2011) analyzed data from the Block and Block (1980, 2005) longitudinal project, with an emphasis on parenting styles. Using data from roughly 100 participants at ages 3 and 23, Cramer (2011) examined data concerning childhood personality, the same preschool narcissism precursors used in the previous study, age 23 personality, age 23 narcissism, child-rearing styles (of the subjects' parents), and use of the defense mechanism of denial. Cramer (2011) reported that parents' use of *authoritative, indulgent*, or *permissive* parenting styles at age 3 was predictive of the presence of healthy, adaptive narcissism at age 23. In contrast, the use of an *authoritarian* parenting style at age 3 was negatively related to healthy narcissism at age 23. Additionally, consistent with the Carlson and Gjerde (2009) analyses, Cramer (2011) reported that narcissistic precursors at age 3 were predictive of maladaptive narcissism in young adulthood.

In addition to statistical main effects of childhood personality and parenting styles, Cramer (2011) found that these two factors interact to predict maladaptive narcissism in young adulthood. Specifically,

> in interaction with the young child's proclivity to narcissism, Responsiveness that is inappropriate to the child's developmental level, being too little in infancy/very young childhood (Authoritarian) or too great in adolescence (Indulgence), plus Demandingness that is inappropriate to the child's developmental level, being too great in infancy/very young childhood (Authoritarian) or too little in adolescence (Indulgence), is related to maladaptive narcissism. Demandingness and Responsiveness that are developmentally appropriate (Authoritative) will predict adaptive, healthy narcissism. (Cramer, 2011, p. 26)

The results reported by Cramer (2011) are consistent with six studies reviewed by Horton (2011), which found significant associations between maladaptive narcissism and parental psychological control, parental authoritarianism, excessive or inconsistent parental control, and parental *overdomination*. Parenting phenomena such as excessive parental control and overdomination can be considered, essentially by definition, as never developmentally appropriate levels of Demandingness, and thus are predictably associated with maladaptive narcissism. On the other hand, parenting phenomena such as parental indulgence and parental warmth have been found to be associated with both adaptive and maladaptive narcissism (Horton, 2011), which seems consistent with current theory and research findings because different levels of parenting features such as warmth and indulgence can be considered more or less appropriate across stages of a child's development; as Cramer (2011) suggests, developmentally appropriate levels of Demandingness and Responsiveness lead to adaptive narcissism.

Thus, there are indications that behaviors observable as early as preschool are significant predictors of future narcissism during adolescence and emerging adulthood, in addition to interactions between parenting behavior and childhood personality characteristics that predict later narcissism. However, much more research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the antecedents of narcissism in emerging adulthood. This issue is particularly important given the concerns regarding normative increases in narcissism and the purported role that parenting behaviors play.

Demographic Differences in Narcissism

AGE

Foster et al. (2003) examined age differences in narcissism in data collected from a diverse sample of Internet users (N = 3,445) across multiple geographic regions and ages (mean age = 24.5 years, SD = 9.1, range 8–83 years). Overall, they found that narcissism (measured with the NPI) was negatively correlated with age (r = –.17), and this age trend held after controlling for annual income and gender. However, given that this was a cross-sectional study, it was not possible to disentangle a cross-sectional age trend from a cohort effect. That is, the older adults in their sample, for example, could have always had lower narcissism than the emerging adults because cohort effects could have led to the emerging adults having inflated narcissism all of their lives. Or, the older adults might have been just as narcissistic as the emerging adults at similar ages, yet maturational impacts led them to exhibit decreases in their narcissism as they aged, and the emerging adults in the sample might experience the same decline as they age. A longitudinal follow-up of this cross-sectional study (called a *cohort-sequential study*) is needed to disentangle these potential age and cohort effects. As far as we know, there are no cohort-sequential studies of narcissism available. However, a couple of longitudinal studies are available, and they support the cross-sectional age trend.

In adolescence, Carlson and Gjerde (2009) found that narcissism increased from age 14 to 18 and then leveled off from age 18 to 23, reinforcing the hypothesis that narcissism is perhaps highest in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Edelstein et al. (2012) found that some aspects of narcissism decreased during middle adulthood, but others increased. Specifically, they found that Hypersensitivity—viewed as the most pathological aspect of narcissism and characterized by grandiosity, entitlement, inhibition, defensiveness, and low self-confidence—decreased from age 43 to 53, supporting the cross-sectional findings, but that Willfulness—a mixture of adaptive and maladaptive traits, such as exhibitionism, poor impulse control, and self-confidence—increased from age 43 to 53. Thus, this longitudinal finding suggests that the age trajectory of narcissism might be best studied at the facet level of narcissism, rather than through the summary score.

Foster et al. (2003) mentioned three possible reasons that narcissism might change across the life span: (1) the clinical concept of "disorder burnout" (i.e., age as a mitigating factor for a psychological

disorder), (2) decline in narcissism subsequent to objective life failures (i.e., narcissism is naturally tempered by accumulation of life experiences), and (3) cultural shifts that produce cohort effects with respect to narcissism. Nonetheless, the problem remains: to varying degrees, the results (i.e., that narcissism tends to decrease with age between approximately the ages of 16 and 54) obtained support all of these hypotheses. Second, whether such an effect is due to normative life span changes in narcissism, sociocultural shifts, or a mixture of both, there remains the question of whether the observed differences in scores on the NPI across age are practically meaningful (i.e., can be connected with nonarbitrary, tangible, real-world outcome measures; see Kazdin, 2006). That is, the reality is that the NPI total score seems to capture some amalgam of confidence, leadership, and social potency along with more socially harmful elements of personality such as a sense of entitlement and a willingness to exploit others. This fact makes it difficult to give a clear and unambiguous interpretation of what is represented by a relatively high score on this measure because it might reflect heightened levels of socially toxic traits (e.g., entitlement), somewhat obnoxious traits (e.g., vanity), socially adaptive traits (e.g., leadership), or some indeterminate mixture of these components. In addition, there is a question of measurement invariance. An interesting idea to entertain is this: perhaps older people and younger people are roughly equivalent with respect to the latent variable narcissism, but differ (statistically) significantly with respect to how they answer questionnaires such as the NPI. Needless to say, there is much work to be done, because deeply complicated questions arise when addressing personality variables such as narcissism from a generational perspective.

GENDER

In many studies to date, males score significantly higher on measures of narcissism across the life span. For example, in the diverse Internet sample mentioned earlier, Foster et al. (2003) found that males reported greater levels of narcissism than did females (d = .24). Furthermore, this difference held when age and income were simultaneously controlled for. Similarly, Carlson and Gjerde (2009) reported that males scored significantly higher on measures of narcissism at ages 14, 18, and 23.

With respect to parenting behaviors, there does appear to be some moderating effects of child and/or parent gender on development of narcissism. Research on possible differential effects of maternal and paternal parenting behavior are mixed, with some evidence that maternal parenting behaviors are more strongly associated with child narcissism. However, studies examining differential effects of parenting behaviors on male and female children have been more consistent; three studies have suggested that excessive parental control is only associated with female child narcissism, but that parental indulgence is associated with child narcissism in males and females (Horton, 2011). Differential effects of maternal and paternal parenting behaviors and differential effects of parenting behaviors on male and female children are logical objects of future research, given the relative paucity of extant data.

When considering narcissism in emerging adults from a generational perspective, we must also ask whether significant gender-specific cohort effects exist across recent decades. For example, Twenge (1997) reported via meta-analysis that women between the 1970s and 1990s scored higher on the Masculinity scale of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI-M) (r = .74) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire Masculine scale (PAQ-M) (r = .43). Furthermore, Twenge (1997) reported that the difference between male and female scores on the BSRI-M decreased over this 20-year period. Thus, women seem to have significantly increased the level at which they endorse masculine-stereotyped traits in recent decades. Twenge et al. (2008*e*) report on a series of analyses on a subset of their meta-analysis data, noting that male scores on the NPI did not exhibit a statistically significant positive linear relationship (β = .16) with time between 1992 and 2006, yet female scores did exhibit a significant positive linear relationship (β = .46). Furthermore, the authors note that, between 1992 and 2006, female NPI scores seemed to be catching up to male scores, moving from 0.45 SD below male scores in 1992 to 0.15 SD below male scores in 2006. Additionally, women increased in their level of endorsed Agentic traits (assertiveness, extraversion, and self-esteem) between the 1970s and 1990s, which are positively correlated with narcissism (see Twenge, 1997; Twenge et al., 2008*e*).

As discussed previously, there is evidence that the NPI measures primarily adaptive forms of narcissism or *normal* narcissism. We also know that, often, many college-aged research samples contain a majority of female participants. This raises the possibility of whether any significant increases in NPI scores or measures of Agentic traits such as assertiveness, self-esteem, and extraversion over time are a function of female and male personality

convergence rather than a general rise in narcissism. An interesting hypothesis for future research would be to test whether the "narcissism epidemic" actually reflects changes in the attributes of women rather than a more pervasive generational trend that extends to both women and men. Males have traditionally scored significantly higher than females on measures of narcissism, but this difference appears to be decreasing, and women seem to be endorsing more content that has been historically masculine-stereotyped. It seems plausible that gender convergence in personality traits could account for any apparent general rise in narcissism. That is, higher scores over time on the NPI may simply mean that young women are becoming more confident in their abilities. This serves to further emphasize the complexities of studying personality in emerging adults across time; we must continue to be mindful of other relevant variables such as gender and culture, to which we now turn.

CULTURE

Research on culture and narcissism is nearly nonexistent. To be sure, Twenge and colleagues' research on rising levels of narcissism is cultural in that they link changes in societal attitudes and practices within the United States to changes in narcissism. However, few studies have been conducted outside the United States, either on their own or in comparison to American samples. Indeed, in a recent chapter devoted to culture and narcissism, Twenge (2011) largely reviews findings on self-esteem, individualism, personality traits, and national character—not narcissism, per se. One exception is the study by Foster et al. (2003) who compared narcissism scores from participants in five world regions (United States, Canada, Europe, Asia, and Middle East). They found that those from the United States had significantly higher levels of narcissism than participants from Asia (d = .15) and the Middle East (d = .20). These regions were then grouped to represent individualistic cultures (US, Canada, Europe) and collectivistic cultures (Asia and the Middle East), with results indicating that narcissism was higher in the individualistic cultures. In contrast, another study found that Chinese college students reported significantly *higher* narcissism than did American college students (d = .46; Kwan, Kuan, & Hui, 2009). In sum, research on the cultural nature of narcissism is rather sparse, and the existing research suggests small and inconsistent effects.

Future Directions

The most pressing future direction in the study of narcissism and other phenomena as they concern emerging adulthood is to increase communication not only between subdisciplines of psychology, but also between research camps. Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010) presented this need excellently, stating, "action must be taken to resolve disjunctions and integrate findings in future conceptualizations of pathological narcissism, otherwise continuing disparate efforts will impede progress toward a more sophisticated understanding of this complex clinical construct" (p. 422). This sentiment is also clearly applicable to the study of adaptive, nonclinical, trait-level narcissism. Definition of narcissism is a major issue. If there were more consensus in the definition and assessment of narcissism, it might be easier to resolve ongoing debates. An additional problem is that many studies to date have used archival data, often data that did not directly measure narcissism but rather other constructs thought to be indicators of narcissism. As we have discussed, narcissism is a complex construct, and research with increasingly distal indicators of the construct or components of the construct can be difficult to interpret. As we move forward, it becomes not only important to compare today's emerging adults to those of similar ages from previous cohorts, but also to accumulate a wealth of healthy datasets on today's emerging adults. Doing so will help ensure that we do not encounter some of the difficulties that we now commonly grapple with when the time comes to compare this generation of emerging adults to future generations of emerging adults; this is to say that we should think long-term when collecting data. There is also the need for more data from diverse populations of emerging adults, including participants who do not attend institutions of higher learning. As Arnett (2013) mentions, a college education has become increasingly more common of late, yet the college-going population remains a relatively small portion of those who fall into the category of emerging adults. We simply need to collect data from sources outside of the college campus.

Also, most research to date has relied exclusively on self-report measures. Thus, the results inform us as to how people answer items thought to be indicators of the narcissism construct. Perhaps people are becoming more or less willing to endorse certain item content, with the underlying true score on the construct not changing over time. Or, the opposite is possible, that levels of narcissism are

indeed changing, but the way that individuals present themselves on self-report questionnaires is not. The study of narcissism and of emerging adulthood in general would benefit from a shift toward nonarbitrary metrics (see Kazdin, 2006), investigating observable behaviors and health outcomes as opposed to attitudes expressed on self-report questionnaires.

An important area for future work on generational changes more broadly is to critically analyze the idea of a *generation* itself. How do we define a generation, and what is the basis for the application of a broad label to those therein? A recent report from Pew Research Center (2014) sought to describe the nature of the so-called Millennial generation (sometimes referred to as Generation Y) in comparison to Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation. They defined each of the generations as follows: Millennials, born after 1980; Generation X, born 1965–1980; Baby Boomers, born 1946–1964; Silent Generation, born 1928–1945. Although they provided these definitions, what was not included was the *rationale* for these definitions, or a description of how the cohort labels were developed and accepted. Each of these labels comes with its own psychological portrait, suggesting that, by understanding an individual's generation, we can understand something about that individual. Although there certainly could be some validity to the idea of generational differences that stand apart from age, there is obviously an enormous amount of heterogeneity within each generation. Indeed, the idea of unique generations lies vulnerable to the general problem of formistic systems within scientific inquiry (Pepper, 1942). To be useful, categories must be both homogenous and have reliably identifiable cut-points (Meehl, 1973). Absent these criteria, it is perhaps best to approach both generational and developmental change in continuous terms, allowing for both linear and nonlinear change. We must think critically about the idea of "generations," especially when the boundaries between cohorts may not have a strong theoretical or empirical basis.

The final necessary future directions mentioned here relate to communication and collaboration. The difference between interdisciplinary communication and interdisciplinary collaboration is an important one, and the study of emerging adulthood would benefit from both. Communication can be enhanced by drawing together professionals to engage in more discussion about what narcissism is, what emerging adulthood is, and how we should go about continuing to study them. A logical extension of increased communication between disciplines (research camps, etc.) is increased collaboration. There is a need for those in seemingly competing camps of researchers (i.e., those who have tended to come to different conclusions about emerging adults) to conduct collaborative studies. Multisite studies conducted by individuals or groups who have traditionally come to different conclusions about emerging adults would surely be interesting, informative, and a positive future direction.

Conclusion

In summary, current age-differences data on narcissism suggest that average levels peak in mid to late adolescence or perhaps early emerging adulthood, then level off with slight decline, followed by a significant decrease in later life. The popular media perception is that today's young people, who are in the midst of a relatively new developmental period known as emerging adulthood brought on by myriad sociocultural shifts, are excessively narcissistic. Some in the scientific community share this view. However, others have challenged this conclusion, and the debate stands unresolved. If there is indeed a cohort effect at work, and today's emerging adults are significantly more narcissistic than past cohorts were at similar ages, the interpretation must be done with extreme caution. The reality is that labeling an entire generation is a challenging proposition given the great diversity that exists within cohorts.

Acknowledgments

It is a complicated and daunting task to study a phenomenon that changes across the life span and across generational cohorts. This task is further complicated by the fact that researchers are often relegated to use of archival data, which is commonly messy, incomplete, and often does not include direct measures of the constructs of greatest interest. It takes a certain intellectual courage and boldness to wade through complicated datasets in an attempt to produce findings that inform even more complex and nuanced research questions. Research on personality in emerging adulthood continues to make great progress because of the willingness of scholars such as Jeffrey Arnett, Jean Twenge, and many others to engage in open and productive debate. Sincere thanks to those who continue to investigate and publish on these topics.

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PART 2

Structural Influences

CHAPTER 4

Emerging Adulthood Theory and Social Class

Manuela du Bois-Reymond

Abstract

Emerging adulthood theory (EAT) has gained wide support in the social sciences over the past 15 years despite critical comments also being voiced. This contribution positions EAT within the main European traditions of theories about change in the lives of young people. It shows that EAT has antecedents in many of these theories, but without taking social class as thoroughly into account as it should. This is demonstrated by reanalyzing a US survey and by, albeit indirectly, referring to a European project that established a typology on educational disadvantage based on a multilayered methodology. The chapter encourages increasing cooperation between scholars in the field of youth studies in order to both overcome disciplinary rigidity and discourage a naïve reliance on interdisciplinarity as remedy for all problems.

Key Words: prolongation of youth, youth transition research, transition typologies, methodological problems, epistemological problems

Introduction

Over the past 10 years, the discussion about emerging adulthood theory (EAT) has aroused the interest and concern of scholars from different social science disciplines inside and outside the United States. I was invited by the editor to join that discussion by focusing on the issue of social class within that theory. I take that opportunity, realizing that other scholars have spoken on that topic before me. I want to enlarge the topic by placing EAT within a broader framework of youth and modernization and thus contribute to interdisciplinary youth research and theory building. I proceed in three steps: first, I give an overview of involved disciplines relevant to Jeffrey Arnett's theory; second, I focus more specifically on the issue of social class and emerging adulthood; and third, I hope to contribute to the discussion by referring to a European project that deals with matters of emerging adulthood, albeit in different ways and contexts. In the conclusion, I discuss broader issues of youth research and implications for the further development of EAT.

Emerging Adulthood Theory in the Social Sciences

When Arnett launched the concept of emerging adulthood in 2000, he stepped into a long-standing discussion in youth studies. His intention was to ascertain the well-established body of theory and empirical evidence of adolescent psychology and open it for new developments impacting on the human life course. This—his—discipline is traditionally interested in developmental laws structuring the period of adolescence and that are assumed to be essentially universal. There is broad agreement among the engaged disciplines about the nature of social changes in late modernity, in America as well as in Europe. At the heart lies a *prolongation of the youth phase* set in motion through education, which has greatly gained in importance and has served to keep many more students within