Twenty-Somethings in the Classroom and Counseling Office: Understanding Emerging Adult Counseling Students

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Emerging Adults in the Classroom and Counseling Office: Understanding Emerging Adult Counseling Students

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Trends affecting young adult graduate enrollment

- 54% employment rate among 18- to 25-year-olds is lowest in modern history (Pew Research Center, 2012)
- Only 11% who do work consider their job to be a long-term career (Pew Research Center)
- More young adults delaying employment by staying in college longer and entering graduate school (Arnett, 2004)
- Over 800,000 GRE’s completed in 2011, 13% higher than 2010 (the previous record-high year; ETS, 2012)
Problem Statement

- Counseling programs are likely to be increasingly comprised of individuals coming directly from an undergraduate program.

- Arnett’s (2000) theory of Emerging Adulthood (EA): There have been significant changes in the developmental trajectories for 18- to 25-year-olds over the past several decades.

- Counselor educators and supervisors would be aided by understanding EA and its implications for students and new counselors.
Session Goals

- Learn about emerging adulthood and the many developmental and transitional changes taking place during this period.

- Learn about the application of these changes to conceptualizing emerging adult counseling students and supervisees.

- Learn about the practical implications that counselor educators and supervisors can use when working with emerging adults to promote their well-being and successful transition into the counseling profession.
Emerging Adulthood

• (Arnett, 2000; 2001; 2004): Changing social conditions have resulted in delayed developmental progressions into adulthood

• Previously normative life goals are less frequently attained by today’s 25-year-olds

• Emerging adults: not quite adolescents, not quite adults

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)  

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1970</th>
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<tr>
<td>Avg. Age of Marriage- Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Age of Marriage- Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avg. Age of Parenthood</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How is Emerging Adulthood Unique?

- **Demographics**
  - Instability (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1999)
  - Romance: Earlier cohabitation, later marriage & childbirth (Flatau et al., 2007)
  - Professional Life: More than 50% of EA’s change career fields within 2 years after college (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008)

- **Subjective Definitions of Adulthood**
  - EA’s view their progression to adulthood as lengthy and nebulous (Arnett, 2001)
  - Qualitative study by Lopez et al. (2005): internal character qualities (e.g., accepting responsibility) vs. objective measures (job/relationship status)

- **Identity Exploration**
  - Extended moratorium from life obligations = more time to explore identity decisions (Schulenberg et al., 2004)
  - Love, work, & worldviews (Arnett, 2004)
Lane (in press): Extended identity exploration creates critical period for well-being during normative transitions

Common EA transitions:
- High school graduation (Gore & Aseltine, 2003)
- Leaving home (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006)
- Entering college (Kenny & Sirin, 2006)
- Leaving college (Lane, in press)
- Professional life (Lane, 2012; Polach, 2004)
Lane, 2012
- Imposter phenomenon in emerging adulthood
- 29 EA’s who were working or near graduation (Bach. & Masters)

**Internal Qualities**
- Perfectionistic
- Low Confidence/Self-Worth
- Unable to Self-Validate

**External Factors**
- Comparison
- Evaluation
- Experience

**Imposter Phenomenon**
- Discrediting
- Fraudulence
- Self-Criticism
- Self-Doubt

**Impact of the Imposter Phenomenon**

**Performance Impact**
- Work Harder
- Avoidance
- Nervous Behaviors

**Internal Impact**
- Anxiety
- Inhibited Internalization of Ability
- Guilt
Identity Exploration Strategies

- Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery (2005):
- EA’s in higher education programs vary with regard to identity crystallization
- Less self-understanding -> more interpersonal difficulty in higher education
- Intervene at both cognitive and emotional levels
  - Cognitive: Self-exploration (orientation toward exploration and problem-solving competence)
  - Emotional: Self-discovery (flow, personal expressiveness, and self-actualization)
“I lack life experience, how could I have anything to offer my adult clients?”

Difficulty w/ self-evaluations

Often, counseling represents first exposure to professional life
Suggestions

- Normalize anxiety
  - Validating developmentally appropriate affective reactions
  - Self-disclosing positive AND negative experiences

- Emphasize self-evaluation
  - ‘Complete the critique’
  - Invite student to self-evaluate first

- Be intentional with feedback

- Promote self-care strategies

- Consider affective and cognitive self-development activities
Implications for Future Research

My dissertation:
The Impact of Attachment Working Models and Social Support on the Subjective & Psychological Well-Being of Emerging Adults in Transition: Testing a Theoretical Mediation Model