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

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Citation Details

Lane, Joel A., "Twenty-Somethings in the Classroom and Counseling Office: Understanding Emerging Adult Counseling Students" (2012). *Counselor Education Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 29. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/coun_fac/29

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



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Problem Statement

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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

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- **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

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- 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

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- (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)	1970	Present
Avg. Age of Marriage- Female	20	26
Avg. Age of Marriage- Male	22	28
Avg. Age of Parenthood	21	25

How is Emerging Adulthood Unique?

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- **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)

Emerging Adulthood & Transition

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Lane (in press): Extended identity exploration creates critical period for well-being during normative transitions

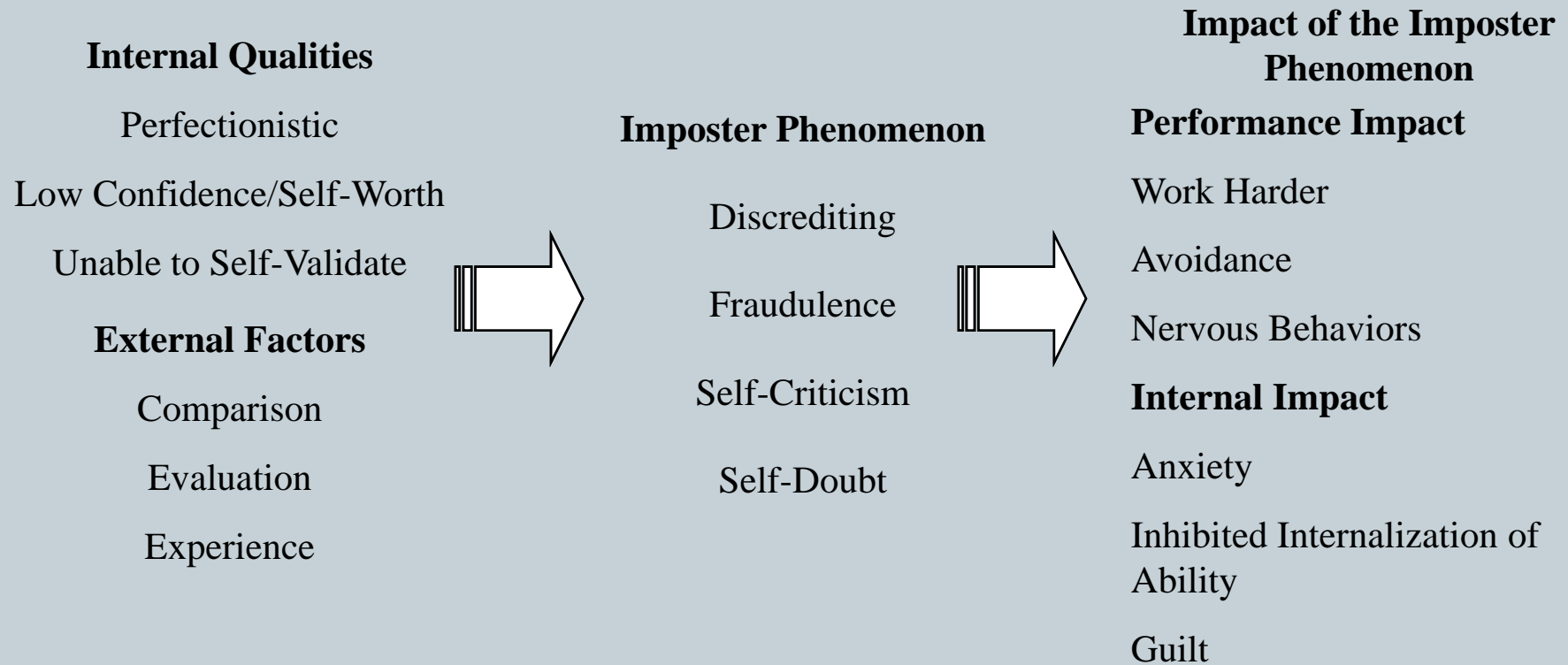
Common EA transitions:

- **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)**

Emerging Adults & Professional Life

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- Lane, 2012
 - Imposter phenomenon in emerging adulthood
 - 29 EA's who were working or near graduation (Bach. & Masters)



Identity Exploration Strategies

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- 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)

Common Themes- Students & Supervisees

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- “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

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- **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

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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

