

YATR Literature Review

A Preliminary Report to Project Partners

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Emerging Adulthood

We will be using the term *emerging adults* to describe young adults in this study. In this section, we will briefly review some of the terms used to describe young adults in the literature and to explain why we settled on emerging adults.

Psychologist Erik Erikson proposed the idea of the *emerging individual* as part of his theory of psychosocial development.¹ The emerging individual, whom Erikson mostly thought of as an adolescent, was negotiating a role in society and emerging toward adulthood.

Erikson proposed an 8-stage theory of psychosocial development (see table 1 below). Erikson’s stages are epigenetic, meaning one stage must (usually) be completed before the other can begin. Each stage is completed with a *crisis* when a *virtue* is attained. If a virtue is not attained, a person can become stuck at that stage of development.

Table 1. Erikson’s 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Crisis	Virtue	Approximate Ages
1	Trust v. Mistrust	Hope	Birth to 1.5 years
2	Autonomy v. Shame	Will	1.5 to 3 years
3	Initiative v. Guilt	Purpose	3 to 5 years
4	Industry v. Inferiority	Competency	5 to 12 years
5	Identity v. Role Confusion	Fidelity	12 to 18 years
6	Intimacy v. Isolation	Love	18 to 40 years
7	Generativity v. Stagnation	Care	40 to 65 years
8	Integrity v. Despair	Wisdom	65 +

Sources: Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* and Saul McLeod, “Erikson’s 8 Psychosocial Development Stages,” Simply Psychology (2017) (<https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html>).

Erikson’s crises and virtues have technical meanings that do not necessarily correspond to plain or simple meanings. For Erikson, *crisis* is used in “a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential.”² *Virtues* are “an inherent strength ... or qualities which begin to animate man pervasively.”³ They are a strength, the fruit of a successfully negotiated crisis that allows one to proceed to the next stage. Our focus is on stages 5, *Identity vs Role Confusion*, and 6, *Intimacy vs Isolation*, which correspond most closely to the age range of the emerging adults in this study.

According to Erikson, identity (stage 5) is attained by negotiating a role with or within a group. There are many groups with which young adults could negotiate an identity, including churches and other religious groups. For Erikson, however, “it is the inability to settle on an occupational

¹ Erikson, *Identity*.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

³ *Ibid.*, 232.

identity which most disturbs young people.” So, when Erikson talks about negotiating a role, he is, in the main, talking about “access to specialized work” or an “occupational identity.”⁴ In the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage, adolescents, or emerging adults, are

sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day.⁵

For Erikson, these “ideal prototypes” are the ones that correspond with “the wave of a technological, economic or ideological trend” of the day, and the least “stormy” adolescence, is found “in that segment of youth which is gifted and well trained in the pursuit of expanding technological trends, and thus able to identify with new roles of competency and invention and to accept a more implicit ideological outlook.”⁶ Simply put, those who can assume a role society most values have the least stormy emerging adulthood. Erikson goes on to explore what happens when Emerging Adults cannot negotiate these roles, but we will not go into that.

The virtue of *fidelity* in stage 5 is the ability to “trust in oneself and in others.”⁷ Justin Sokol, writing about Erikson’s development theory says that, identity

provides a deep sense of ideological commitment and allows the individual to know his or her place in the world. It provides one with a sense of well-being, a sense of being at home in one’s body, a sense of direction in one’s life, and a sense of mattering to those who count. Identity is what makes one move with direction; it is what gives one reason to be.⁸

The virtue of *love* in stage 6, *Intimacy vs Isolation*, is the ability to have a “new and shared identity” characterized by “true fusion or real self-abandon” to another that moves beyond identity as I-am-what-I-do (role) in stage 5 to I-am-what-I-love in stage 6.⁹ As Erikson explains:

“The youth who is not sure of his identity [stage 5] shies away from interpersonal intimacy [stage 6] or throws himself into acts of intimacy which are ‘promiscuous’ without true fusion or real self-abandon.”¹⁰

Erikson observes that technological advances make mastering, targeting and attaining these preferred societal roles (stage 5) more difficult and time consuming. He saw this widening time

⁴ Ibid., 127 and 131.

⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁷ Ibid., 128.

⁸ Sokol, “Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory,” 4.

⁹ Erikson, *Identity*, 135, 137.

¹⁰ Ibid., 135.

between childhood and adulthood requiring “almost a way of life” between the two.¹¹ Erikson called this way of life a *psychosocial moratorium*. Erikson explains:

“A moratorium is a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time. By psychosocial moratorium, then, we mean a delay of adult commitments, and yet it is not only a delay. It is a period that is characterized by a selective permissiveness on the part of society and of provocative playfulness on the part of youth, and yet it also often leads to deep, if often transitory, commitment on the part of youth, and ends in a more or less ceremonial confirmation of commitment on the part of society.”¹²

Erikson saw these moratoria coinciding, for the most part, with “apprenticeships and adventures that are in line with a societies values.”¹³ To be clear, Erikson’s *moratorium* is not one of his developmental stages, rather it is a hiatus from development that can span the fifth and sixth stages. It is also significant that these psychosocial moratoria are facilitated both by the emerging adult and by society, that is, they are joint creations.

Although Erikson did not place strict age ranges on his stages, scholars agree that he had adolescence, roughly 12-18 years of age, in mind for his *Identity vs. Role Confusion* stage.¹⁴ At the time Erikson was writing *Identity and Youth Crisis* in 1968, 12-18 was a natural age range for this stage, however, “research now suggests that the most extensive advances in identity development occur after high school/in college. It is during this time that students/individuals make important decisions that pertain to various life domains including occupation, friendship, romantic relationships, and religious or political beliefs.”¹⁵ The demands of identifying “ideal prototypes” in a society with rapidly changing ideologies and technologies, means that the moratorium period is being extended and enlarged. The *Intimacy vs Isolation* stage (stage 6) now occurs between ages 18 and 40. Arnett says that the demographic changes associated with emerging adulthood, which builds on Erikson’s development theory and his idea of a moratorium, “have taken place worldwide over the past half century, ... [in] developed countries ... and increasingly [in] developing countries as well.”¹⁶

Jeffrey Arnett, Research Professor of psychology at Clark University, building on Erikson’s idea of a *psychosocial moratorium*, Levinson’s *novice phase* and Keniston’s *youth*, argued for the term *emerging adulthood* to describe individuals ages 18 to 29.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹² Ibid., 156.

¹³ Ibid., 157.

¹⁴ Sokol, “Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory,” 2; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 9; McLeod, “Erik Erikson.”

¹⁵ Sokol, “Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory,” 5.

¹⁶ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

¹⁷ Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties,” 470.

When Arnett first introduced the term *emerging adulthood*, he described it as “... a time of frequent change as various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews are explored” and “a distinct period of the life course” that had expanded beyond the teen years.¹⁸

Arnett pointed to delays in marriage, age of first birth for women, and young adults obtaining higher levels of education as factors that helped create emerging adulthood.¹⁹ For Arnett emerging adulthood is distinct from both adolescence and young adulthood, while largely overlapping and replacing both. It is a suspension of development that Arnett called a *roleless role*, a description that is significant because, insofar as identity is a negotiated role with a group, a *roleless role* is the negation of identity, or the suspension of one.²⁰ This description fits well with the idea of Erikson’s *moratorium* which he saw as potentially requiring the reintegration of the virtues attained in previous stages of development. That is, everything is up for grabs.

Arnett’s *emerging adulthood* has these characteristics:

1. **Identity exploration:** Answering the question “Who am I?” and trying out various life options, especially in love and work;
2. **Instability:** in love, work, and place of residence;
3. **Self-focus:** as obligations to others reach a life-span low point;
4. **Feeling in-between:** in transition, neither adolescent nor adult; and
5. **Possibilities/optimism:** when hopes flourish and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.²¹

Christian Smith, professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame, and Patricia Snell, co-director of the Center for Social Research at the University of Arkansas, also use the term emerging adulthood, but their works considered in this literature review focus on “just the first half of emerging adulthood,” ages 18 to 23.²² Powell et al use several terms in *Growing Young*, but follow Arnett in using the term *emerging adults* for this life stage, although they limit the age range to 19- to 29-year olds.²³

Canadian sociologist, Reginald Bibby, uses the term *emerging millennials*, to describe “Canada’s newest generation.”²⁴ The term emerging millennials acknowledges Erikson’s developmental psychology while grounding his work in the sociological Millennial generation, although in Bibby’s *Emerging Millennials*, he restricted his sample to teens age 15 to 19.²⁵

¹⁸ Ibid., 469.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 471.

²¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 7–9.

²² Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 3–4.

²³ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 29.

²⁴ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009.

²⁵ Ibid., 214. Bibby’s 15- to 19-year-olds would have been born between 1989 and 1993.

In her 2014 edition of *Generation Me*, Jean Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, calls Millennials, those born between 1982-1999, *Generation Me* (GenMe).²⁶ In earlier editions of *Generation Me*, Twenge's age range was 1970 to 1999, however she conformed her age ranges to the sociological generation "just to make it easier" to facilitate conversation.

Most literature on emerging adults and Millennials (or Generation Y (Gen-Y)) tend to treat the terms as synonymous. Occasionally, in the interviews and in the literature, Generation Z (Gen-Z) is discussed. James Emery White, past president at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, defines Gen-Z as those born between 1995 and 2010.²⁷ White's Gen-Z range overlaps with Twenge's Millennials demonstrating the lack of consensus on boundaries between sociological generations. Nevertheless, the oldest of White's Gen-Z cohort would be in their early twenties, well within the 18- to 28-year-old range for this study.

Others use terms like *young adults*, *young people*, or *young leaders* which convey youthfulness, but no connection to Erikson's theory of personality development. Erikson's personality development framework will be central to this analysis, so we will use *emerging adults* as it acknowledges Erikson and finds common usage in the literature.

When we refer to emerging adulthood going forward, we will use it in three senses. First, emerging adulthood will be used in the aggregate sense to capture the various terms used by the authors in the literature review. Second, it will refer to the fifth and sixth stages of Erikson's 8-stage theory of psychosocial development. Third, it will refer to our own sample of young adults age 18 to 28.

Transitioning to Adulthood?

The YATR research project looks at the transition from high school to the next phase in life for young adults age 18 to 28, focusing primarily on the younger end of this age spectrum. A transition has a prior state, a transitional state and an end state. So, what boundary, period or phase are young adults crossing as they leave high school? Where are aiming to end up?

Several decades ago, many young adults were transitioning to an adulthood, defined by things like marriage, family formation, full-time employment, and home ownership, shortly after graduating from high school. Higher education, if it was in view, was brief for most. The Adulthood Delayed section looks at how these measures have changed for Canadian young adults over the past four decades.

²⁶ Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, 6.

²⁷ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 37–38.

Arnett says that most young people post-high school are transitioning into *emerging adulthood*, and to think of it as a transition to adulthood is problematic because the focus then moves to adulthood causing us to miss what is happening in emerging adulthood.²⁸ Moreover, thinking of the transition from high school to the next phase in life as a transition to adulthood, falsely assumes that, for today's young people, psychosocial development continues at the same pace as in previous decades.

These developmental assumptions seem to be prevalent. For example, Yuen and Lau in a 2014 church-based work looking at transitions, titled a section "The Adolescence to Adulthood Transition," which suggests an understanding of development that moves from adolescence to adulthood. Emerging adulthood is still a fairly technical term used primarily by academics and youth and young adult ministry professionals. It may be that Yuen and Lau were simply framing their section within a paradigm that most of their readers would understand, but even so, it speaks to the persistence of the idea that after high school young adults quickly grow up and become adults.²⁹ Arnett quotes an emerging adult named Leslie who put it clearly: "There's not a break and you become an adult. It's just a long, gradual process."³⁰

So, what are emerging adults aiming at? What are their objectives? According to Smith and Snell,

The central, fundamental, driving focus in life of nearly all emerging adults is getting themselves to the point where they can 'stand on their own two feet'.³¹

Arnett found that emerging adults consistently listed the following three criteria for adulthood:

- Accepting responsibility for yourself,
- Making independent decisions, and
- Becoming financially independent.³²

The adulthood that is the aim of emerging adults is primarily marked by independence, and assuming responsibility for one's own life. Significantly, they tend not to talk about assuming responsibility for others' lives as would be the case if they were to have a family. It's not that the traditional markers of adulthood (marriage, family, etc.) are not in view, it is just that they are optional.

²⁸ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 22–24.

²⁹ Yuen and Lau, "Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth," 34; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 23.

³⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 321.

³¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 34.

³² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 15.

For emerging adults, as Arnett observes and our interviews confirm, that for emerging adults adulthood is not just about checking boxes and noting accomplishments, it is a “feeling [that] grows in them that they have become adults.”³³

Emerging adults are trying to meet Arnett’s three criteria in an economic climate that is, according to Twenge, drastically different than that of preceding generations.³⁴

Speaking from an American context, White says that one of Gen Z’s defining characteristics is that they are “Recession Marked” and that “their coping mechanisms [from the United States’ 2001 and 2007-2009 recession] have led to a strong sense of independence and an entrepreneurial spirit.”³⁵

When Arnett asked college students to write about their college experience, their satisfaction was based mainly on what they experienced in terms of *personal growth*.³⁶ As Arnett describes,

College is a social island set off from the rest of society, a temporary safe haven where emerging adults can explore identity possibilities in love, work, and worldviews with many of the responsibilities of adult life minimized, postponed, or kept at bay.³⁷

Little Church Attention Given to this Transition

It seems that churches tend to understand the post-high school transition, as a transition away from or out of the church. Yuen and Lau’s “The Adolescence to Adulthood Transition” report lists 8 specific ways congregations can help young adults with this transition. Five of these eight are framed with an implicit or explicit assumption that an ongoing relationship between the emerging adult and the church is not in view.³⁸ Yuen and Lau seem conscious that many of their readers may be expecting a break between emerging adults and the church. In one of their suggestions for helping young adults across this transition they explain: “This is not a ‘send them away from your church’ moment ...”³⁹

The *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhage Faith Report* lists ways “veteran youth workers are working through the problem of transitions.” Of the report’s 12 suggestions, only one directly addressed the post-high school transition.⁴⁰

Yuen and Lau’s report and the *Transfusing Life* report suggest that church-based youth and young adult ministry tends to be focused on adolescents and that they expect emerging adults

³³ Ibid., 332.

³⁴ Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, Chapter 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

³⁶ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 159.

³⁷ Ibid., 167.

³⁸ Yuen and Lau, “Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth,” 34–35.

³⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁰ Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, *Transfusing Life: Practical Responses to the Hemorrhaging Faith Report*, 5–6.

to have moved out of their ministry orbit. Smith et al in their conclusion to *Lost in Transition* write:

Many religious congregations ... devote significant resources to children and teenagers, yet unfortunately seem to passively accept that their ties to youth will be lost after the high school years. ... Success in this would require thoughtful planning, intentionality, investment and sustained effort.⁴¹

Although, as Arnett observes, this is a critical time to engage because

for most people the process of forming a worldview is not completed by the time they leave adolescence. It is during emerging adulthood that people address worldview questions most directly, and it is during emerging adulthood that most people reach at least an initial resolution to their worldview questions.⁴²

Morality

Hemorrhaging Faith found that many young adults disengage with church because of conflicts with churches' moral teachings.⁴³ It is important, therefore, to understand how emerging adults approach moral questions. In this section, we will situate emerging adult moral development within Erikson's psychosocial development framework, discuss moral individualism, and Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism as a strategy for minimizing moral difference.

Morality and Moratorium

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and his idea of a moratorium provide a framework for understanding emerging adults and their sense of morality. The *virtue* emerging from the identity crisis of the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage is fidelity, which is characterized by the ability to trust oneself and others. Moral commitments are expressions of this capacity to trust and to believe in something. Individuals in a psychosocial moratorium phase, however, have deliberately suspended such commitments.

For Erikson, ideally, individuals move through the crisis at the end of each stage, achieve the virtue and move on. In the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage, however, identity formation can be *foreclosed*. Identity foreclosure occurs when an emerging adult makes identity commitments about the future without exploring their options, or they make commitments in situations where they have few or no options.

Erikson recognized that the American understanding of the "development of a self-reliant personality" was dependent on "a certain degree of choice ... and a firm commitment to the freedom of self-realization."⁴⁴ He made this comment in the context of a discussion about the

⁴¹ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 241.

⁴² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 212.

⁴³ Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 66.

⁴⁴ Erikson, *Identity*, 133.

difficultly young people experienced in identity formation when a poor economy or an economy transitioning to new technological realities made it difficult for them to find constructive work. In other words, circumstances, like a poor economy, sometimes lead to a foreclosure of identity formation. In the literature, any kind of identity foreclosure is viewed negatively because it denies the individual the crisis that leads to what is considered healthy psychosocial development.

Arnett notes that whether a young adult experiences *emerging adulthood* is somewhat a function of social class “with young people in the middle class or above having more opportunities for the explorations of emerging adulthood than young people who are working class or below.”⁴⁵

The moratorium period, or what Arnett would call emerging adulthood, is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities/optimism.⁴⁶ Here options are open, possibilities are maximized, and, therefore, moral commitments that grow out of commitments, inherent settled identities and the psychosocial virtue of fidelity, must be minimized, or at least be kept open. To accept moral limits at this stage, would be a kind of foreclosure, and a truncating of the moratorium period.

Individualistic Morality

According to Smith et al, most emerging adults are *moral individualists*.⁴⁷ Moral individualism emphasizes personal choice and individual decision while not judging others in moral matters. Moral individualism is, then, an implicit social contract between individuals asserting personal, sovereign moral spheres, and granting those spheres to others. To have an individual morality does not necessarily mean the individual is a moral relativist. Moral individualists may hold strong moral positions, but they will insist that these positions not be judged, and they will reciprocally withhold judgement of others’ moral positions. Smith et al found that while most of their sample of emerging adults were moral individualists, only a minority (30%) were moral relativists.⁴⁸

Arnett addresses similar themes, explaining that emerging adults have grown up in diverse circles of mutual tolerance where “everyone has the right to believe and behave as they wish so long as they do not harm others.”⁴⁹ Arnett states that individualism devalues community *but also (ironically)* has a harmful effect on the individual themselves:

⁴⁵ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 25–26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

⁴⁷ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 21, 27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 290.

The more individualistic a society becomes, and the less people feel they have meaningful roles in a stable social system, the more they find themselves “unable to escape the exasperating and agonizing question: ‘To what purpose?’⁵⁰

Here in Canada, Bibby found that 7 in 10 *emerging millennials* explicitly endorsed the two-word cliché “everything’s relative.”⁵¹ In his discussion, however, he allowed that “it’s not that most even know what the phrase [everything’s relative] means.”⁵² He then went on to clarify that a similar percentage endorsed “what’s right or wrong is a matter of personal opinion.” which tends to confirm what Smith et al concluded: What at first appears to be moral relativism may simply be moral individualism, since a personal opinion is not necessarily a morally relative one.⁵³

Bibby goes on to make an interesting observation about the way in which some emerging adults are morally relative. Using the example of the value of honesty, Bibby says that honesty is very important for the majority of young people.

Where the relativism comes in is not with respect to the value itself, but in how it is applied. In one situation one chooses to be honest; in another, one chooses to be dishonest. *What is relative is the application, not the value.*⁵⁴

One could argue whether Bibby is, in fact, describing moral relativism. His point, however, is clear: the emerging millennials he is describing do not understand themselves to be moral relativists. The inherent goodness of the self is preserved in the young adult’s mind, even in the face of contradictory behaviour.

Smith *et al* also discuss this tendency of emerging adults to protect their moral self-understanding in their discussion about emerging adults and regrets. While protecting themselves from external sources of judgement, emerging adults escape self-judgement (or internal judgement) by suppressing feelings of regret.⁵⁵ According to Smith and Snell, avoiding regret:

Helps to protect a sense of personal self – which seems *sacred* to emerging adults – against threats the ultimate god of “being yourself” in a world in which the self is central, since actually having regrets implies that the self embodies something that is wrong or undesirable.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁵ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 41.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Understanding emerging adulthood as a moratorium means that the *crisis* of identity has not happened, and the virtue of *fidelity* that allows emerging adults to make strong moral commitments has not yet been achieved. Smith and Snell point out that a strong moral sense is a precondition for feeling regret, and this is something many emerging adults lack:

The very idea of regrets presupposes a clear sense of good and bad, right and wrong by which to judge, which – as we will show – many emerging adults lack.⁵⁷

Smith *et al*, writing about emerging adults and individualistic morality, argue emerging adults' moral reasoning tends not to be rooted in "external guides":

The major first point to understand in making sense of the moral reasoning of emerging adults, then, is that most do not appeal to a moral philosophy, tradition, or ethic as an external guide by which to think and live in moral terms. Few emerging adults even seem aware that such external, coherent approaches or resources for moral reasoning exist. Instead, for most emerging adults, the world consists of so many individuals, and each individual decides for themselves what is and isn't moral and immoral.⁵⁸

Emerging adults do not appeal to philosophy, tradition or ethics as external guides because to do so would be to accept a *foreclosure*. Moreover, to insist that others accept external guides is to impose a foreclosure and is sometimes called *coercive moral absolutism*.⁵⁹

Smith *et al* observes that emerging adults "appear to possess few moral reasoning skills" and they mostly fault public schools, families and the media who they say, "avoid talking about potentially controversial moral issues" and avoid teaching moral reasoning.⁶⁰ Speaking about contemporary American society in general, Smith *et al* conclude:

We are letting [emerging adults] down, sending many, and probably most, of them out into the world without the basic intellectual tools and basic personal formation needed to think and express even the most elementary of reasonably defensible moral thought and claims.⁶¹

The resistance to external guides has its origins in the desire for a unique, and therefore authentic, set of moral commitments. Arnett explains:

one reason the beliefs of many emerging adults are highly individualized is that they value thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and believe it is

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 33, 62.

⁶¹ Ibid., 61.

important to form a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma.⁶²

Rhetorically, *ready-made dogma* is set against *thinking for oneself*, and it is accepted that thinking for oneself will result in something unique and original which are seen as necessary qualities of authenticity.

This quest for originality creates an extraordinary burden to either generate a demonstrably unique set of beliefs, or to deny all external guides as the next most acceptable position. Steve Jobs, Apple co-founder, highlights the tension between dogma and the individual in his 2003 Stanford commencement address:

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice, heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.⁶³

Steve Jobs has articulated a sentiment that emerging adults hold to be true: religious beliefs need to be defined by and unique to an individual herself in order to be valid. Authenticity and originality have become linked ideas, causing young adults to question the validity and authenticity of religious institutions and systems rooted in longstanding traditions.

Arnett, echoing Jobs, says to accept an external guide is understood as a kind of failure:

For most emerging adults, simply to accept what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition would represent a kind of failure, and abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves, become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs.⁶⁴ [Emphasis added]

If accepting an external guide amounts to a failure, it must be asked, "What was the task?"

Chris Tompkins, Don Posterski, and John McAuley argue that *emerging Christians* have an *elastic morality*. They define elastic morality as "An emerging Christian mindset for right and wrong that:

- Creates space for diversity
- Resists judgment
- Extends uncensored acceptance
- Exchanges certainty for mystery

⁶² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 217.

⁶³ Crouch, "Steve Jobs."

⁶⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 226.

- Stretches the boundaries of belief and behavior.⁶⁵

The elasticity of the morality “stretch[es] what [emerging Christians] believe and how they behave to accommodate others.” There is an implicit assumption in the choice of an elastic metaphor that the morality of these emerging Christians will return to the shape of traditional Christian morality once the occasion of “stretching” to accommodate others is gone.

Moral elasticity, a resistance to coercive moral absolutism, tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and individualistic morality are all expressions of a desire to avoid *foreclosing* on the *moratorium* or *emerging adult* life phase that is extending into the late twenties.

Arnett takes issue with the description by Smith *et al* of emerging adults as moral individualists who are morally adrift. Emerging adults, according to Arnett, volunteer at higher rates than their parents and they are less likely to die in an automobile crash, get arrested or smoke tobacco (they are, however, more likely to binge drink and to use marijuana or hashish).⁶⁶

Twenge echoes Arnett’s observations about emerging adults’ lower rates of engaging in risky behaviors, however, she says attributes it to the restructuring of their psychosocial world by technology, particularly the smartphone, not because of an improved moral foundation.⁶⁷ For example, today’s emerging adults are less likely to die in an automobile crash mostly because they are less likely to drive.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

If emerging adults are moral individualists, *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* (MTD) is a religious system compatible with their moral outlook. MTD can be summarized in the following five statements:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.⁶⁸

Smith and Denton contend that MTD has:

⁶⁵ Elastic Morality, 19.

⁶⁶ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 237, 283–90.

⁶⁷ Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”

⁶⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14; Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 154–55; Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163.

displaced the substantive traditional faiths of conservative, black, and mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism in the United States ... It may be the new mainstream American religious faith for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society.⁶⁹

In an echo of the complaints by Smith *et al* about the failure of schools to equip emerging adults with skills for moral reasoning, Kenda Creasy Dean, associate professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues that “Christianity is bankrupt” because “we have not invested in [emerging adults’ spiritual] accounts: we ‘teach’ young people baseball, but we ‘expose’ them to faith.”⁷⁰

MTD has the appearance of “substantive traditional faiths” in its vague references to God, a common morality manifested in niceness, and its gestures to ultimate things, such as the promise of heaven, without requiring a common, coherent moral outlook. MTD allows emerging adults to avoid conflicts with parents, or others who may have more traditional and commonly held religious beliefs, while also avoiding the conflicts with their peers that would be created by moral judgement. Parents and churches do not press moral issues too strongly because MTD looks enough like “substantive traditional faiths” and the live-and-let-live ethic of moral individualism is not threatened by the vague moral requirement of niceness. Dean says that with MTD, emerging adults experience religion as “homogenizing, not polarizing.”⁷¹ MTD, then, is a suspension of moral and religious development that parallels the suspension of psychosocial development inherent in a *moratorium*.

Spiritual Transmission

The Bible, echoing covenant language, describes the Christian faith as a “deposit” (2 Timothy 1:13-14) entrusted to us to be handed down to the next generation. Both Old and New Testaments are concerned with the transmission of the faith from generation to generation. How does this happen?

The literature talks about spiritual transmission happening in two contexts: in the home with parents (and grandparents) and in the church or Christian communities. In both contexts conversations in relational contexts characterized by warmth were key to successful spiritual transmission. It is especially important for emerging adults to be able to articulate their beliefs and questions about faith.

Parents and Family

Developmental psychologist Vern Bengtson along with Norella Putney and Susan Harris list three factors in “successful” religious transmission from one generation to the next:

⁶⁹ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 171.

⁷⁰ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

1. Strong and intentional bonds between family and church or synagogue, in which religious activities are built around family activities with high family involvement in religious education,
2. Emphasis on parents' role modeling, evidenced in their investment in the tradition and their articulation of its beliefs,
3. The value given to family solidarity, characterized by warm emotional relationships, frequent family interaction, help and assistance.⁷²

Bengtson *et al* use a four-question scale to measure religious transmission, which they understand to be the transmission of religiosity. For them, parents can pass on a strong, weak or non-existent religiosity. Religious transmission is said to be "successful" when the child's 4-question profile closely matches their parents', whatever it is. The scale has the following components:

1. Religious intensity: How religious would you say you are?
2. Religious participation: Frequency of religious service attendance at religious services
3. Agreement with a literal or conservative interpretation of the Bible, and
4. Agreement with the importance of religion in civic or public life.⁷³

It is interesting to note that this scale measures the transmission of religiosity, not religious affiliation. Although their study also compared parent-child religious affiliations, they argue that "religious affiliation today appears less central to core aspects of religiosity that, say, an individual's feeling for the importance of religion or spirituality to his or her personal life."⁷⁴

Bengtson *et al* identify *warmth* between parents and child as the pivotal factor in spiritual transmission, especially warmth between a father and his children.⁷⁵ *Warmth* is how close a child feels relationally to their parents. Bengtson *et al* measure warmth with the question "Taking everything together, how close do you feel is the relationship between you and your father (or mother) these days?" They found a higher rate of parent-child similarity on their four-question spiritual transmission scale when children felt their relationship with their parents was close, or warm.⁷⁶ Although having a close relationship with both parents is important for successful spiritual transmission, Bengtson *et al* found that "having a close bond with one's father matters even more than a close relationship with the mother," although there are some variances by religious tradition.⁷⁷ Moreover, Bengtson *et al* say that good parental devotional modeling is unlikely to be a successful spiritual transmission strategy without close parent-child relationships, or warmth.⁷⁸

⁷² Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 190.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 71–98.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

Powell and Clark describe the kind of faith that supports successful spiritual transmission “sticky.” They list three characteristics that make faith “sticky”:

1. **Sticky Faith is both internal and external.** Sticky Faith is a part of a student’s inner thoughts and emotions and is also externalized in choices and actions that reflect that faith commitment. These behaviors include regular attendance in a church or campus group, prayer and Bible reading, service to others, and lower participation in risky behaviors, especially engaging in sex and drinking alcohol.
2. **Sticky Faith is both personal and communal.** Sticky Faith celebrates God’s specific care for each person while always locating the faith in the global and local community of the church.
3. **Sticky Faith is both mature and maturing.** Sticky Faith shows marks of spiritual maturity but is also in the process of growth.⁷⁹

Like Bengtson *et al*, Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute and professor at Fuller Theological Seminar, and Chap Clark, professor of Youth, Family and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, also talk about the kind of parenting that makes for successful spiritual transmission. They list two “pivotal” parental tasks:

1. We help our kids learn to trust God and create the kind of environment where they are able to explore faith and trust while practicing their freedom to respond in love.
2. We model an unconditional love in which our kids can do nothing that jeopardizes or even lessens that love.⁸⁰

Both of these tasks infused with the *warmth* that Bengtson *et al* describe as pivotal for successful spiritual transmission. In the discussion by Bengtson *et al*, however, the role of the child’s relationship with God is not in view, whereas Clark and Powell put helping kids to learn to trust God as the preeminent task.

Powell and Clark, whose book is written for parents, asserts, “More than even your support, it’s who you are that shapes your kid.”⁸¹ Powell and Clark quote Smith and Lundquist to support their assertion of the central role of parents:

Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents.⁸²

⁷⁹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸² Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.

Penner *et al*, in *Hemorrhaging Faith*, found that when parents, both mom and dad, regularly read the Bible, regularly engaged in personal prayer outside of table grace and regularly attended religious services, that roughly three-quarters of their children were at least somewhat likely to practice these spiritual disciplines as young adults.⁸³ Significantly, they found that consistent modeling of devotional practices on the part of both parents more than doubled the likelihood these practices are replicated in the lives of their young adult children compared to those who were either inconsistent or where only one parent was consistent.

While Arnett found a relationship between the religiosity of adolescents and parents especially where parents “talk about religious issues and participate in religious activities.”⁸⁴

Grandparents

Bengtson *et al* also point to the growing importance of grandparents in spiritual transmission. They attribute this growing importance several factors. Longer life expectancy gives grandparents more time with their grandchildren. Grandparents have more available time on the part of grandparents to be with their grandchildren. As well, a growing number of grandparents are raising their grandchildren because the parents are unable to parent.⁸⁵ They use a similar analysis for measuring grandparent-grandchild religious transmission as for parent-child transmission.

Church or Community

The literature seems to agree that church-based young adult ministry is primarily programmatic, and that programmatic ministry is less effective (if not detrimental) for faith transmission and growth. Non-parental adult relationships characterized by warmth and conversation are advanced as a better ministry paradigm. In most cases, these relationships are described as mentoring.

Problems with Program

The literature identifies three problems with programmatic ministry: It tends to be mismatched with psychosocial development stages, it only provides temporary roles which do not form a stable basis for identification with religious communities, and young adults tend to resist joining the groups that characterize programmatic ministry.

Powell *et al* observe that many church programs are targeted to age ranges rather than psychosocial development stages. Age targeting worked well when age ranges could function as aliases for developmental stages. Writing about the local church context, they identify a ministry “hole” created by “extended adolescence”:

⁸³ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging Faith,” 75–78.

⁸⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 224.

⁸⁵ Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 100.

Thinking in terms of only these three demographic categories [high school students, college students, and young married couples] leaves holes in our ministry offerings today. Extended adolescence means there's a new gap between college and marriage that most congregations ignore."⁸⁶

Assumptions from the past about age and development no longer hold, leading to ministry "holes."

Moreover, programs only offer temporary age-related roles within a Christian community. To the extent that identity is about negotiating a role in a group, age targeted programs only offer roles and identities for the duration of the group. When young adults age out of a group, their role and role-based identities are set aside requiring them to go through the difficult work of renegotiating a role in the next age-based program group.

Twenge adds that another difficulty with program-based ministry is that "young people would rather do their own thing than join a group. Across the board, youth are now less likely to approve of or be interested in large institutions such as government, mass media, and religious organization."⁸⁷

Warmth

Bengtson *et al* argued that successful spiritual transmission depended on warm relationships between parents and children. The literature makes a similar case for warmth as a basis for spiritual transmission in other non-parental adult relationships. In some cases, *warm* relationships may be described as *safe* ones.

Powell *et al* say churches should aim for warm peer and intergenerational friendships that will fuel a warm community, instead of focusing on programmatic ministry⁸⁸ They explain that "as young people are choosing a church, warm community is often a stronger draw than belief."⁸⁹ Powell *et al* talk about "being welcoming, accepting, belonging, authentic, hospitable, and caring," as a *warmth cluster*.⁹⁰ They go on to suggest that programs may actually work against creating the warmth that is necessary for spiritual transmission:

Ironically, it is possible that your church actually might be working against warmth by offering a myriad of programs. In churches growing young, many young people shared that their church culture is moving away from unnecessary busyness. A deprogramming [removal of programs within the church] strategy

⁸⁶ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 121.

⁸⁷ Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, 47.

⁸⁸ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 25–26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 170–71.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

sometimes helps to elevate relationships by opening up time and space where they can flourish.⁹¹

Dean argues that “the best [faith] translators are people, not programs.” She goes on to explain that programs often try to replicate adults’ religious experience while dis-incarnating that experience, resulting in a faith “translation” that is often wooden, distorted, stilted and bland – all things that are the antithesis of warmth.⁹²

Pamela Ebstyne King writes that “fellow [religious] travellers play an important role in enabling young people to internalize beliefs, values and morals.” Citing Erikson, King writes that “ideology,” which is how Erikson understood religion, needs to be embodied to be “effective in the development of a prosocial identity.”⁹³ An embodied “ideology” or religion is a warm one.

Powell and Clark found that “by far, the number one way that churches made the teens in our survey feel welcomed [and valued was when adults in the congregation showed an interest in them.”⁹⁴

Conversation

If warmth is the precondition for relationships that foster spiritual transmission, conversation is the way the transmission happens. This is important because it means that didactic methods (i.e. teaching, or classes), or passive methods (ie. Listening to sermons) are less effective.

Dean says that “families and communities that encourage practices in which teenagers must put religious convictions and experiences into words are more likely to have highly devoted teenagers.”⁹⁵ This echoes findings about the power of conversation for faith formation from the Canadian Bible Engagement Study (CBES) which found that frequency of conversations about the meaning of the Bible was positively correlated not only with Bible reading but also with religious service attendance.⁹⁶ Dean also points to the need to help teenagers develop *religious articulacy*, the ability to talk about and explain one’s faith.⁹⁷ Specifically, Dean says we need to have conversation that “both claim and confess our religious identities for ourselves and others, and critically examine the role of faith in our lives” and that has as its content “Jesus-talk, not just God-talk.”⁹⁸ Articulacy gained in conversation requires individual processing of religious content, and this processing is done in the contexts of community.

⁹¹ Ibid., 167.

⁹² Dean, *Almost Christian*, 123.

⁹³ Ebstyne King, “Spirituality as Fertile Ground for Positive Youth Development,” 58.

⁹⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99.

⁹⁵ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 135.

⁹⁶ Hiemstra, “Confidence, Conversation and Community: Bible Engagement in Canada, 2013.”

⁹⁷ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 136.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 139.

Powell and Clark recommend having conversations about the difficult issues in the lives of emerging adults while encouraging individual thought.⁹⁹ Emerging adults need a safe space in which to engage difficult issues, ask tough questions and reveal legitimate doubts that hinder their faith. Students who feel the freedom and have opportunities to express their doubts tend to have more continuity in their faith.¹⁰⁰

Powell and Clark say that although parents who talk with their kids about faith tend to ask questions, it is “vital to Sticky Faith ... that [they] also share about [their] own faith,” with all its ups and downs.¹⁰¹

Rite of Passage Ceremonies

Rite of passage ceremonies are designed to confirm the individual in the community, that is, to give them an identity. Powell and Clark suggest using rituals, “social custom[s], or even a normal way of going about something, that provides the comfort of history, regularity, and even tradition,” to reinforce identity.¹⁰² If psychosocial development theory is correct, however, the effectiveness of these rituals or rites of passage will depend on when they happen.

These sacraments or events are viewed as rites of passage or ceremonies that bolster identity. Many of these ceremonies were developed when identity formation happened earlier in life. The *Hemorrhaging Faith* study found that most young adults that experienced infant baptism or confirmation say these events do not hold significant meaning for them.¹⁰³ If Arnett is correct in hypothesizing that identity formation and worldview formation occur primarily during emerging adulthood, then these events come too early for identity formation and are likely to be supplanted in their effect by experiences during emerging adulthood.

Identity formation is about negotiating a role in a community. Rites of passage that do not create a role in a community are less likely to be effective for identity formation. Powell, advocates for other less-traditional rites of passage in which elders and mentors in the church ushering emerging adults into a valuable place in the church. One such example involves taking graduating high school students on a hike with all of the pastors, elders and mentors in their lives and performing a ceremony that signifies the student officially becomes one of the adult congregation officially.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 72–74.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 60–61.

¹⁰³ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging Faith,” 94.

¹⁰⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 117.

Why Spiritual Transmission Fails

The good news is that when relationships with teens are warm, and conversations about faith are taking place, many will share the faith of their parents or church. Arnett goes on to say, however:

Evidently, however, something changes between adolescence and emerging adulthood that often dissolves the link between the religious beliefs of parents and the beliefs of their children.¹⁰⁵

Arnett traces this dissolution to emerging adults' gradual exposure to more and more influences and ideas outside the family, but

probably even more important is the responsibility that emerging adults feel to decide for themselves what they believe about religious questions. ... **For most emerging adults, simply to accept what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition would represent a kind of failure, and abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves,** become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs.¹⁰⁶ [Emphasis added]

It seems the implicit task set before young adults to generate a unique set of beliefs that are seen as an authentic expression of the self requires dissolution of the link between the religious beliefs of parents and the beliefs of the children.

Young adults reject religious institutions and participation in those institutions for a variety of reasons. Arnett says:

In part, their disinclination to take part in religious services is due to their lifestyle. Many of them work hard during the week, often combining work and school, and they see the weekend as the time to sleep late and relax.¹⁰⁷

Arnett says that those who reject religious institutions usually do so because "the doubt the morality of those institutions."¹⁰⁸ Penner *et al* stagnant community and restrictive teachings and beliefs as barriers to religious participation which are, as Arnett says, judgements about the morality or moral teachings of the church as an institution.¹⁰⁹

One of the paradoxes of emerging adults is that while they may tend to be moral individualists most wish "to live a personally fulfilling life while also doing good to others."¹¹⁰ Arnett sees this as a collectivist impulse that is often at odds with the perception that emerging adults, as moral

¹⁰⁵ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 224.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁰⁹ Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith," 52–72.

¹¹⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 243.

individualists, are self-absorbed. Penner *et al* found that young adults were looking to experience God and vibrant community.¹¹¹

It is also important to understand the meaning of happiness for emerging adults. Arnett says, “For many emerging adults, pursuing individual happiness means obtaining a wide range of life experiences.”¹¹²

Mentorship

Mentorship is viewed positively in the literature. It is one of the warm relational contexts where emerging adults can have conversations about faith. It is seen as perhaps the most important answer to programmatic ministry’s weaknesses, and the literature fairly consistently laments how infrequently it occurs. Many adults tend to see mentoring as a daunting undertaking and the literature contends that it is not well understood. Mentoring is described in different ways in the literature. Some talk about intergenerational friendships, others talk about non-parental adult investment in children and youth, others talk about sharing life and still others simply use the term “mentorship.” These terms are either chosen to minimize how daunting it mentoring appears or to educate people about mentoring through an alternate term.

The Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec’s *Youth and Family Report* talks about mentoring as “sharing life.” Yuen and Lau, authors of the report, use the term *sharing life* in order to make mentoring less intimidating to potential mentors. They note that many adults in the church do not feel they have time to be a mentor, do not really understand what mentoring is, or they are uncomfortable around youth.¹¹³ *Sharing life* is presented as a six-degree continuum representing different levels of commitment, culminating with formal mentoring in the sixth-degree. Each degree is designed to guide a potential mentor in deepening their relationship with a young adult as a prelude to the formal mentoring that Yuen and Lau see as “the biblical model of discipleship that Jesus demonstrated and Paul and Timothy exemplified.”¹¹⁴

Powell and Clark talk about adults “invest[ing] in your kids.” They recommend churches aim to have 5 adults “whom you recruit to invest in your kid in little, medium, and big ways,” for every child. This 5-adults-to-1-youth ratio, is a reversal of a common one adult to five children rule of thumb in children’s ministry. Powell writes:

Chap [Clark] says a lot of brilliant things, but I think perhaps his most brilliant insight in the last few years is that we need to reverse the ministry adult-to-kid ratio.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Penner et al., “Hemorrhaging Faith.”

¹¹² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 238.

¹¹³ Yuen and Lau, “Transitions: Ensuring Faith Formation in Children and Youth,” 12–13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12–15.

¹¹⁵ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 101.

The insight here, is not the exact ratio, but the principle that children need one-on-one (or five-on-one) adult investment in their lives.

Sam Reimer, professor of sociology at Crandall University, and Michael Wilkinson, professor of sociology at Trinity Western University, talk about “non-parental adult investment in children and youth, by youth pastors or adult lay members.”¹¹⁶

Mentoring and Religious Participation

Mentorship promotes persistence of faith and religious participation.

John Bowen, professor emeritus of evangelism at Wycliffe College, in a 2002-2003 study of those who were *Leaders in Training* (LITs) at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s Pioneer Camp in Ontario from 1981 to 1997, asked “What would you say are the main factors that have enabled you to stay within the Christian faith?” The presence of mentors in their lives was the second most important factor (82%) just after “my relationship with God” (89%) and before friends (81%).¹¹⁷ It is clear is that relationships, either with God, mentors or friends, were the most important factors in continuing in the Christian faith.

Powell and Clark observed that “contact from at least one adult from the congregation *outside* the youth ministry during the first semester of college is linked with Sticky Faith.”¹¹⁸

Reimer, Wilkinson and Penner conclude that “non-parental adult investment in children and youth, by youth pastors or adult lay members, for example, is one factor that promotes institutional involvement into adulthood.”¹¹⁹

Arnett observes that “Emerging adults tend to personalize their relationship with God in a way that makes participating in organized religion unnecessary or even an impediment to the expression of their beliefs.”¹²⁰ Mentoring is a context in which religious questions can be dealt with in a personalized way.

Mental Health, Cultural Scripts, and Technology

Emerging adulthood is a time of paradox. Freedom and opportunity are available like never before, but rates of depression and anxiety are also higher than for previous generations.

The Royal Society for Public Health reported “rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen 70% in the past 25 years.”¹²¹ Twenge and Arnett agree that anxiety and depression

¹¹⁶ Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 165.

¹¹⁷ Bowen, *Growing Up Christian*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 100.

¹¹⁹ Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 165.

¹²⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 219.

¹²¹ “#StatusOfMind,” 3.

are more prevalent among emerging adults than their parents.¹²² Twenge, writing about America, observes “While the suicide rate for middle-aged people has declined steeply since 1950, the suicide rate for young people is now twice as high.”¹²³

Arnett captures the “contradiction” of emerging adulthood:

Often the freedom of emerging adulthood is exhilarating – no one can tell you what to do and when to do it – but along with that freedom can come a sense of isolation, the chill of realizing you are on your own and have to swim constantly not to sink. The result of these contradictory forces is this paradox of mental health during the emerging adult years: overall, self-esteem and life satisfaction are high, but rates of depression and anxiety are high too.¹²⁴

Twenge concurs that individualism leads to isolation, crippling anxiety and crushing depression:

The growing tendency to put the self first leads to unparalleled freedom, but it also creates enormous pressure to stand alone. This is the downside of the focus on the self – when we are fiercely independent and self-sufficient, our disappointments loom large because we have nothing else to focus on. ... All too often, the result is crippling anxiety and crushing depression.¹²⁵

The ability to choose, is no guarantee of making a good choice, or a meaningful one. Arnett, citing Durkheim, says “the more individualistic a society becomes, and the less people feel they have meaningful roles in a stable social system, the more they find themselves ‘unable to escape the exasperating and agonizing question: to what purpose?’ Consequently, incidence of depression and anxiety increases.”¹²⁶

Twenge points to social media as a source of anxiety. Social media makes users aware of more social options creating the Fear of Missing Out, the worry that social events, or otherwise enjoyable activities, may be taking place without you present to enjoy them.¹²⁷ If the social choices are there and you missed the best choice, then you failed in choosing, no one else. On the flipside, if you succeed in choosing, then your successful choice demonstrates your worth, and your successful choices can, in turn, be displayed on social media.

The Royal Society for Public Health noted:

¹²² Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?”; Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 276–80.

¹²³ Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, 147.

¹²⁴ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 276.

¹²⁵ Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, 149.

¹²⁶ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 290.

¹²⁷ “#StatusOfMind,” 12.

The sharing of photos and videos on social media means that young people are experiencing a practically endless stream of others' experiences that can potentially fuel feelings that they are missing out on life.¹²⁸

Recognizing the effects of heavy social media use the Society is calling for the introduction of pop-up heavy usage warnings on social media that would alert users to the potentially harmful effects of heavy social media use, such as anxiety and depression, which they note is sometimes called 'Facebook depression.'¹²⁹

In a 2017 *Atlantic Monthly* article provocatively titled "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" Twenge categorically asserts "There is not a single exception. All screen activities are linked to less happiness."¹³⁰

Some emerging adults arrive at college or university without the life skills or self-discipline to cope. For many young adults during their childhood and adolescence their parents acted as their "resource of self-control and self-discipline" and for some of these:

the freedoms of college life prove to be too much for them to handle. With no one around to exercise control on their behalf, their own resources of self-control and self-discipline prove to be inadequate for the challenges of college life."¹³¹

It is not only the pressure to manage a course load and life expectations. There is greater competition for entrance to college and university programs and within those programs. Twenge, in commenting on college competition, points to a new source of anxiety: The need to stand out.

The new level of competition means that more and more high school students are going to great lengths to stand out.¹³²

Paradoxically, in a world of seemingly infinite choice, with access to seemingly endless social engagement, there is a danger of feeling invisible.

Cultural Scripts

Paradoxically, although many emerging adults feel pressure to create unique identities and belief systems, they also feel pressure to conform to cultural scripts. Smith *et al* suggest that to understand the behaviour of emerging adults, one must also look at the sociocultural context in which they make their decisions.¹³³ Smith *et al* explains that many emerging adults adhere to normative culture by following cultural scripts for roles such as 'teenager' and 'college student.'

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 8, 24.

¹³⁰ Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?"

¹³¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 149.

¹³² Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated*, 158.

¹³³ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 144.

These “cultural scripts tell people who are playing specific social roles [...] how they should think, desire, feel and behave,” compelling emerging adults to engage in certain prescribed behaviour.¹³⁴ Smith *et al* give this example:

The script says that once a person leaves home, they need to exercise their new freedom by partying, acting wild and crazy, perhaps idiotically, partially by consuming large amounts of alcohol and maybe some drugs. ... The script also says that eventually, in one’s late 20s or early 30s, one needs to stop this partying, settle down, and become a good, successful, financially secure family person.¹³⁵

As the idea of a script would suggest, therefore, rather than being independent, original and authentic, many emerging adults seem to do exactly what they are supposed to do.¹³⁶

Social Media and Psychosocial Development

Gerald Kane theorizes that people use social media differently in different psychosocial stages.

Kane structures his theory of social media around Newman and Newman’s modification of Erikson’s development theory which modifies the stage age ranges situating the *Group Identity vs Alienation* stage in ages 12 to 18, the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage in ages 18 to 24, and the *Intimacy vs Isolation* stage in ages 24-34.¹³⁷

Kane identifies four features unique to social media that enable social relationships:

1. A digital profile
2. A list of relational connections
3. the ability to visualize and navigate those connections, and
4. the ability to search content on the platform and also protect it from search.¹³⁸

Kane identifies unique *content* and *structure* for each of these stages. By *content* Kane means “the information resources that users contribute and retrieve through the network, and by *structure* Kane means the “user’s types and patterns of relationships established on social media platforms.”¹³⁹

So the content of the *Group Identity vs Alienation* stage is *affirmation* and the structure is *affiliation*. *Affirmation* is seen in the tendency to transfer or repeat content that others

¹³⁴ Ibid., 142.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Kane, “Psychosocial Stages of Symbolic Action In Social Media,” 5. Kane’s treatment of other psychosocial development stages are not dealt with in this report.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3.

contribute and *affiliation* is seen in “associating or disassociating with certain referent peer groups.”¹⁴⁰

The content of the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage is *vocalizing* and the structure is *exploring*. *Vocalizing* is seen in users making independent or distinct contributions and *exploring* is seen in “increasing the number of relationships, the types of people contacted or the types of relationships developed and maintained on the platform.”¹⁴¹

The content of the *Intimacy vs Isolation* stage is *targeting* and the structure is *prioritizing*. *Targeting* is seen in users sending different content to relationships of different strength, and *prioritizing* is seen in “selecting a small group of relationships from one’s wider network for special attention.”¹⁴²

Our interviews generally confirm Kane’s observations about the different ways social media is used in the stages of psychosocial development. What Kane does not address, however, is the moratorium, or what we are calling emerging adulthood. In Kane’s discussion it would seem that emerging adulthood with its identity exploration mostly falls in the *Identity vs Role Confusion* stage.

A weakness of Kane’s theory is its tendency to identify development stages with particular age ranges. We would argue that there are actually parallel development tracks happening in the virtual or social media worlds and the *real world*. The features of the *real world* can be seen in counter point to Kane’s four unique social media features, keeping in mind what Smith et al and Arnett have said about the fundamental goal of young adults being independence. Kane’s digital profile is a kind of identity expressed in the context of a social media community. The list of connections, and the means to visualize and control them all give the user unprecedented control over their virtual environment. They have the ability to create or experiment with identities, and to control the shape and participants in their social networks. These are all things that are much more difficult to do in the *real world*.

Kane talks about the ways in which social media makes things easier and the influence this ease has on perceptions of social networks. Social media makes it easier to contribute content, it expands the bandwidth for contributing content, allowing for more content, and it provides you ways to easily interact with content (i.e. Facebook likes, or comments). It also allows users to quantify their networks (i.e. How many friends do I have?), and provide automated updates to the user (i.e. status updates), or restrict contacts “giving the perception of exclusivity or intimacy.”¹⁴³ In the virtual space, an emerging adult can achieve their goals sooner, than they can in the real world, or at least have the *perception* of achieving these things.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴² Ibid., 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 3.

If identities are formed through a negotiation with a community, social media allows the user to negotiate an identity where they are substantially in control giving the perception of independence.

For these reasons, we propose that there are parallel psychosocial development track on social media and in the real world, and that online communities are preferred to real world communities because online they provide a foretaste of what the goals hoped for in the real world. Moreover, the moratorium, or the emerging adult phase has appeared at the same time the rise of social media is giving virtually, what dependence on parents in the real world is taking away.

There can be a cognitive dissonance, then, between how emerging adults understand themselves in their social media world and in the real world. In our interviews young adults frequently made distinctions between social media, the college or university environments and the real world.

Adulthood Delayed

Arnett and others argue convincingly that emerging adulthood, rather than adulthood, awaits most young people post-high school. In this section, we will look at some traditional marker of adulthood and quantify how they have been delayed in the past few decades to help us understand the breadth of time that has opened up for emerging adulthood.

Warren Clark writing in *Canadian Social Trends* identifies five “traditional bridges to adulthood”:

- Leaving school,
- Leaving their parent’s home,
- Having full-year full-time work,
- Entering conjugal relationships, and
- having children.¹⁴⁴

In this section we will look briefly at how crossing these bridges to adulthood is being delayed.

Education

Today’s emerging adults are obtaining more post-secondary education than previous generations. Government statistics provide various measures that show this increase in educational attainment.

- In 2011, 68% of young people age 25 to 29 held a postsecondary degree or diploma (including trade certificates) compared to just 43% in 1981.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults,” 13.

¹⁴⁵ Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalca, “What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?”

- In 2006, 29% of Canadians age 25 to 34 held a Bachelor’s degree, and 20% in this age group held a university certificate or diploma above the Bachelor level.¹⁴⁶ By comparison, older generations were less likely to have a university degree. Only 25% of 35- to 44-year-olds, 20% of 45- to 54-year-olds and 18% of 55- to 64-year-olds held university degrees.

Table 1. Highest Education Attainment for Canadians 15 Years and Over 1986, 2006 and 2011, percent

Highest Educational Attainment	1986	2006	2011	Change 1986 to 2011
No degree, certificate or diploma	47.8	23.8	20.1	-27.7
High school graduation certificate	20.3	25.5	25.6	+5.3
Trades certificate or diploma	10.0	10.9	10.8	+0.8
College certificate or diploma	10.4	17.3	18.2	+7.8
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	1.9	4.4	4.4	+2.5
Bachelor's degree	6.4	11.6	13.3	+6.9
University certificate or diploma above bachelor level	1.0	1.9	-	-
Medical degree	0.4	0.5	-	-
Master's degree	1.5	3.4	-	-
Earned doctorate	0.3	0.7	-	-

Source: National Household Survey, 2011 and “Population 15 years and over by highest degree, certificate or diploma (1986 to 2006)” (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/educ42-eng.htm>).

On average, Canadian women attain dramatically higher levels of education than just a few decades ago. Four times as many women age 30 to 34 had a university education in 2001, at 29%, compared to 7% in 1972.¹⁴⁷

The data suggests that there is also a dramatic increase in students going on to take graduate degrees and additional courses. “In 1971, three-quarters of young adults had left school by age 22 whereas only half had left by that age in 2001.”¹⁴⁸ The percentage of full-time students among 15- to 24-year-olds had increased from 39% in 1981 to 58% in 2012.¹⁴⁹

The expectation of educational attainment is rising among young adults. In a 2008 study, Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby found that 62% of male Millennials and 73% of females expected to eventually graduate from university, up from 48% and 55% respectively in 1987.¹⁵⁰ A 2004 government report had similar findings that “... over two thirds of 15-year-olds intend to

¹⁴⁶ 2006 Canadian census.

¹⁴⁷ Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults,” 15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalca, “What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?,” 2.

¹⁵⁰ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 197.

go on to university after completing their secondary studies, with many (39%) aspiring to more than one degree.”¹⁵¹

Most Canadian parents believe that post-secondary education is important. A 2003 study found that “... 95% of parents with children under age 19 believe that education after high school is important or very important.”¹⁵²

Although the majority (68%) of Canadians age 25 to 29 held a postsecondary degree or diploma in 2011, only about half as many held a university degree.¹⁵³ This suggests that many who aspire to a university degree will not attain one.

Those who stayed in Parental Home

More young adults are either staying in the parental home or returning for periods of time after initially moving out. In 1981, 41.5% of Canadians age 20 to 24 lived in the parental home compared to 62.6% in 2016. For those ages 25 to 29 the numbers were 11.3% and 28.8% respectively.¹⁵⁴ More young adults in their early 30s are also living with their parents. Between 2001 and 2016 the percentage of young adults between the ages of 30 and 34 living in their parents’ home rose from 11.2% to 13.5%.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults,” 19.

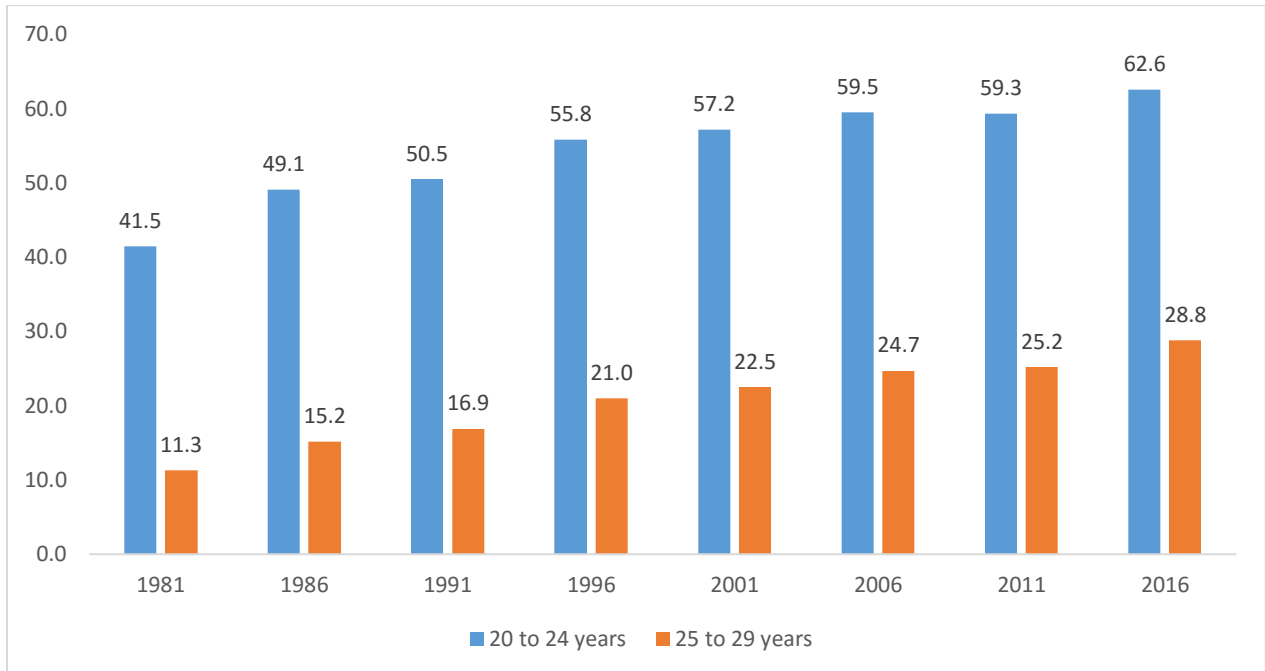
¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalca, “What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?”

¹⁵⁴ “Figure 1 Percentage of Young Adults Aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 Living in the Parental Home, Canada, 1981 to 2011”; Government of Canada, “Families, Households and Marital Status Highlight Tables.”

¹⁵⁵ “Young Adults Living With Their Parents in Canada in 2016,” 1–2.

Chart 1. Percentage of Young Adults Living in the Parental Home, Canada, age 20 to 29, 1981-2016



Sources: “Percentage of young adults aged 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 living in the parental home, Canada, 1981 to 2011,” Statistics Canada (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/2011003/fig/fig3_3-1-eng.cfm) and “Families, Households and Marital Status Highlight Tables,” Statistics Canada (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/fam/Table.cfm?Lang=E&T=32&Geo=00&SP=1&view=1&sex=1&age=1>).

Beaupré, Turcotte and Milan write:

There are a growing number of factors that help explain this growing trend [of returning to family home]. These include the increasing acceptance of common-law relationships (since such unions are more likely to break up than marriages); the pursuit of higher education, which tends to leave young graduates with heavy student debts; financial difficulties; the reduced stigma attached to living with parents; wanting a standard of living impossible to afford on their own; the new and different roles of parents and children in families; and needing a parent’s emotional support during the stressful transition to adulthood and independence.¹⁵⁶

They go on to talk about the how individuation becomes a “continuous process,” which is different from the more discrete “quick cut” that we have tended to associate with moving out:

Leaving home is often a continuing process in which close ties with the family home are unravelled slowly rather than being cut quickly. Even though the child is living elsewhere, some level of dependence remains, whether it is emotional, financial or functional, or all three. In this stage of what researchers have called ‘semi-autonomous

¹⁵⁶ Beaupré, Turcotte, and Milan, “Junior Comes Back Home,” 28.

living,' the family home may provide a form of safety net for young adults and a refuge from financial or emotional difficulties.¹⁵⁷

Because the family home is seen as “a form of safety net” and life is seen as full of emotional, financial and functional threats, it is difficult to say when young adults will feel safe enough to be able to consider themselves fully autonomous.

Beaupré, Turcotte and Milan found that the most common reasons for returning to the family home were:

- 25%, financial reasons;
- 19%, it was the end of the school year;
- 12%, a job had ended;
- 11%, came home with a broken heart, seeking parents' sympathy at the end of a relationship;
- 8%, had quit school.¹⁵⁸

Young adults are less likely to return to the parental home if they:

- Grew up in a small town.
- Grew up in another country
- Were raised in a non-traditional family
- Have a higher level of education and a job.¹⁵⁹

Mobility and Urbanization

Mobility and urbanization are factors influencing when young adults move out of their parents' home. Young adults raised in smaller towns were more likely to leave home than those raised in larger cities as they pursued education and employment opportunities.¹⁶⁰ Young adults in urban settings are less likely to have to move in order to pursue education or employment. Therefore as more young adults grow up in urban settings we can expect to see delays in moves from the family home prompted by the pursuit of education or employment.

Canada is an increasingly urban society. In 2006, just over 81% of Canadians lived in urban settings, up from 64% in 1971.¹⁶¹ In 2006, 85% of young adults age 20 to 29 were living in urban settings. This percentage varies for different populations. Almost all immigrant young adults (96%) live in urban areas but only 61% of Aboriginal young adults.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁰ Beaupré, Turcotte, and Milan, “When Is Junior Moving Out? Transitions from the Parental Home to Independence,” 14.

¹⁶¹ Bollman and Clemenson, “Structure and Change in Canada’s Rural Demography: An Update to 2006,” 12.

¹⁶² Government of Canada, “The Health and Well-Being of Canadian Youth and Young Adults - The Chief Public Health Officer’s Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2011 - Public Health Agency Canada.”

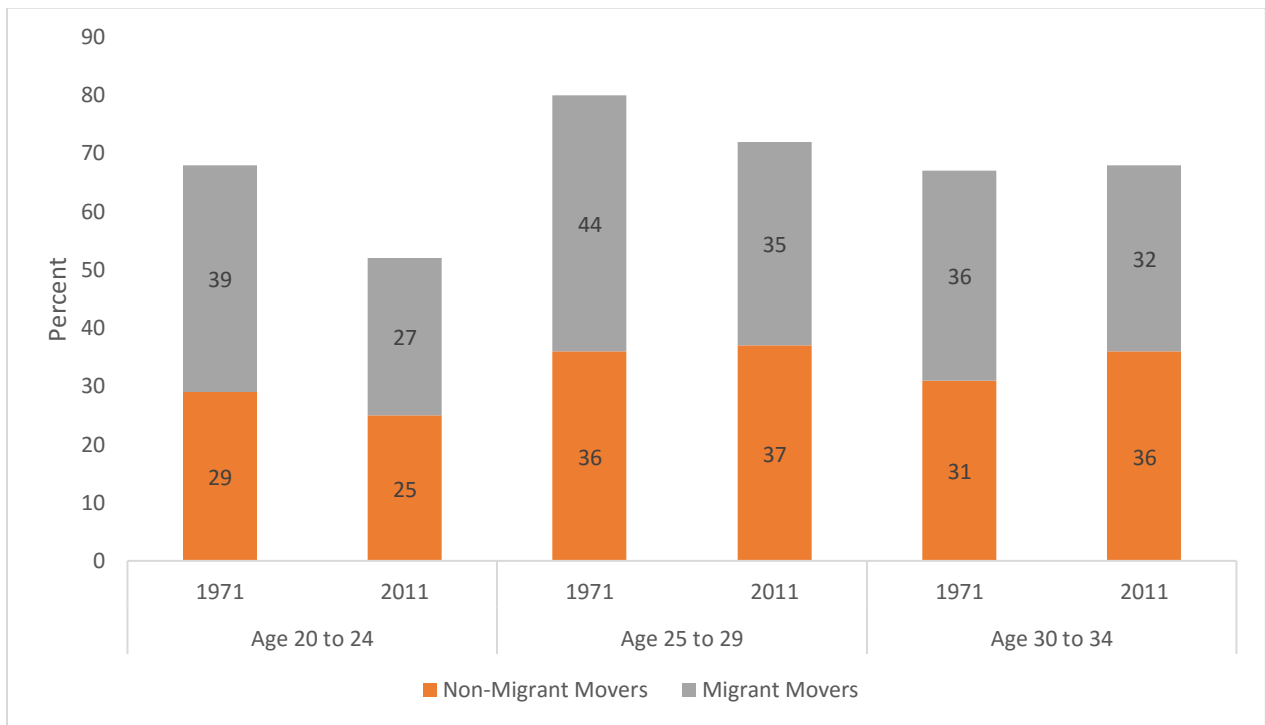
Statistics Canada tracks Canadians’ mobility status on the census with one of three ways:

1. Non-Movers, People who have not moved since the last reference date;
2. Non-Migrant Movers, people who moved but remained in the same city, town, township, village or Indian reserve
3. Migrant Movers
 - a. Internal Migrants, those who moved to a different city, town, township, village or Indian reserve within Canada, and;
 - b. External Migrants, those who lived outside of Canada.¹⁶³

The percent of young adults age 18 to 29 who are *movers* has declined since 1971 (see chart 2 below).¹⁶⁴ Reasons for this decline include:

1. Young adults are delaying the move away from the parental home, and
2. A greater share of the population is being raised in urban settings that offer them opportunities for education and work without requiring a move.

Chart 2. 5-year mobility status for young adults, 1971 and 2011, percent



Sources: 1971 Canadian Census and the 2011 National Household Survey

¹⁶³ Government of Canada, “Mobility and Migration Reference Guide.”

¹⁶⁴ Government of Canada, “2011 National Household Survey.”

Stable Work

Young adults face labour market challenges that earlier generations did not, as Clark describes in *Delayed Transitions*. These include an increasing wage gap between new and more experienced workers, more temporary and contract jobs and fewer employee pension plans.¹⁶⁵

As well, the real hourly wage for men and women age 17 to 24 was significantly lower in 2012 than it was in 1981, an average of 13% and 8% lower respectively.¹⁶⁶

Young adults expect to go to university so that they can obtain the benefits post-secondary education provides including better jobs and increased pay. University degrees or other education credentials tend to give young adults advantages in the labour market. An Association of Universities and Colleges Canada study found that

university graduates comprise 60 to 80 percent of the employees and professionals in the following occupations: business and finance; art, culture and recreation; health; engineering and applied sciences; social and legal professions; and teaching. In addition, close to 40 percent of people in management occupations (outside of food and retail management) have university degrees.¹⁶⁷

Moreover, university education gives graduates a substantial and growing income advantage over high school graduates. Boudarbat, Lemieux and Riddle found male university graduates made 37% more than their high school counter parts in 1980, an income advantage that grew to 50% by 2005. “In 1980, the income advantage for women with a bachelor’s degree [over those with just high school] was 57 percent, and increased to 66 percent in 2005.”¹⁶⁸

Although university degrees tend to give holders advantages acquiring professional positions and obtaining larger salaries, Bibby notes, that “only about 15% of jobs require university credentials.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults,” 19.

¹⁶⁶ Galarneau, Morissette, and Usalcas, “What Has Changed for Young People in Canada?,” 5.

¹⁶⁷ “Trends in Higher Education,” 32.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁹ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 198.

Dealing with Transitions

In a 2008 General Social Survey, 57% of Canadians age 20 to 29 reported experiencing at least one major life change in the last 12 months compared with 51% for those ages 30 to 44, 40% for those ages 45 to 64 and just 25% for those ages 65 or more.¹⁷⁰ A change was considered major if respondents indicated a score of at least 4 out of 5 on a scale where 1 denoted very little impact and 5 indicated a large impact.¹⁷¹

Relationships

Emerging adults are delaying marriage and family formation, even while most expect to eventually form stable marriages and have families.¹⁷²

Marriage

In 2008, the average age of first marriage was 29.6 years for women and 31.0 years for men up from 22.5 and 24.8 in 1974.¹⁷³ Marriage, however, is no longer the predominant type of conjugal union among emerging adults. Canadian common-law union data was first collected on the 1981 census.¹⁷⁴ In 1981, 8.4% of 20- to 24-year-olds and 7.7% of 25- to 29-year-olds lived in common-law unions, and these percentages rose to 11.8% and 22.6% respectively by 2011. Over the same period marriage rates fell from 28.0% for 20- to 24-year-olds and 60.7% for 25- to 29-year-olds to just 4.3% and 23.1% respectively.¹⁷⁵ Although the prevalence of common-law unions grew and marriage rates fell, they were not offsetting. Overall, the share of young adults living as couples declined substantially (see chart 3 below). Young adults are increasingly delaying the formation of conjugal unions of any kind.

Average years Canadians' first marriage in 2008 has been delayed from compared to 1974:

Men: 6.2 years

Women: 7.1 years

Chart 3. Canadians Young Adults in Married and Common-Law Unions, 1981 and 2011, percent

¹⁷⁰ Keown, "Social Networks Help Canadians Deal with Change," 4.

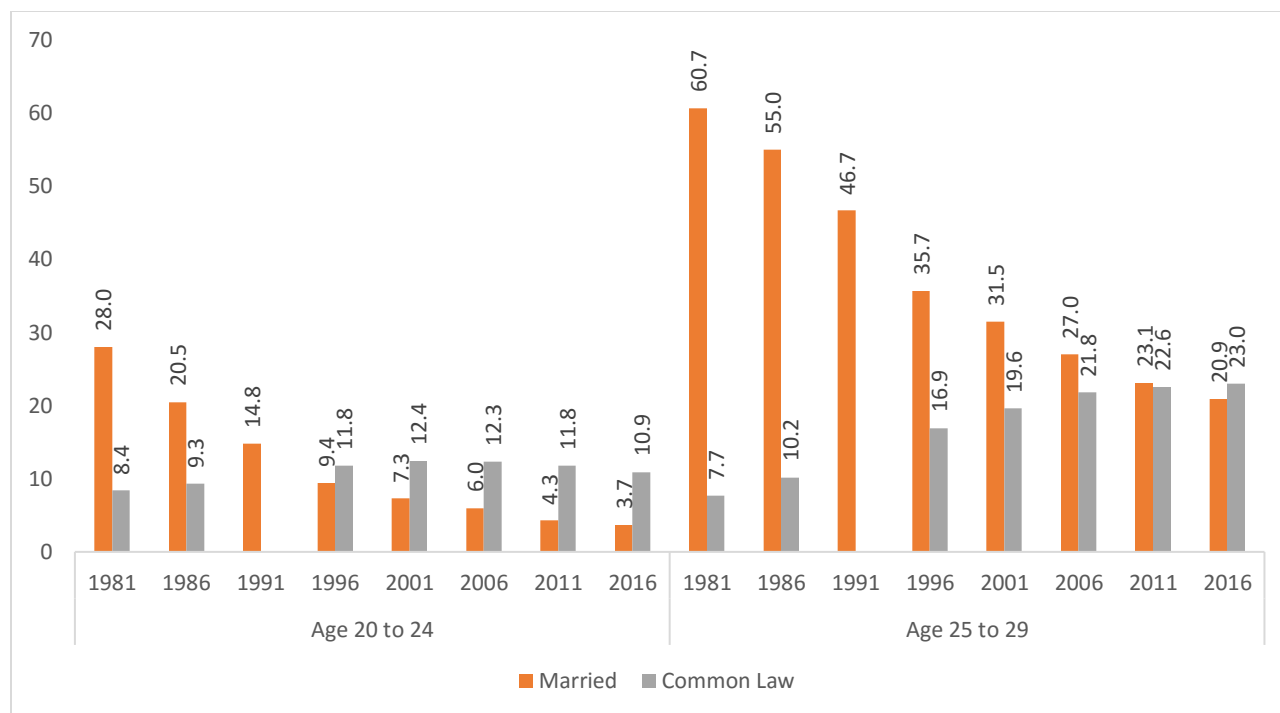
¹⁷¹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷² Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada's Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 199.

¹⁷³ Milan, "Marital Status: Overview, 2011," 10; Nault, "Twenty Years of Marriages," 44.

¹⁷⁴ "Fifty Years of Families in Canada," 1.

¹⁷⁵ "Living Arrangements of Young Adults Aged 20 to 29."



Source: “Living arrangements of young adults aged 20 to 29,” Statistics Canada, 2012. (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14314-eng.htm>) and “Marital Status (13), Age (16) and Sex (3) for the Population 15 Years and Over of Canada, Provinces and Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas, 1996 to 2016 Censuses – 100% Data,” Statistics Canada (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=2&LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=109650&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=117&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>) and “Persons in common-law couples increasing for all age groups,” Statistics Canada (<http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-553/figures/c8-eng.cfm>). Prior to 1991 the Canadian census did not have a question solely on common-law status.

Although young adult marriage rates have declined, a 2008 study of Canadian Millennials by sociologist Reginald Bibby found that 91% of females and 89% of males expect to eventually marry.¹⁷⁶ The reality may be quite different. Marriage rates for emerging adults are at historic lows and they are dropping for Canadians in general. In 2006, for the first time, just over half of Canada’s population age 15 and over were unmarried.¹⁷⁷

Higher education both promotes and impedes union formation. Those with higher levels of education are more likely to get married, but many emerging adults postpone thoughts about marriage and family formation until after university or college.¹⁷⁸ “Other researchers have found that union formation increasingly requires the earning power of both partners, so the labour market problems experienced by young men may reduce or delay formation of unions.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 199.

¹⁷⁷ Milan, Vézina, and Wells, “Family Portrait: Continuity and Change in Canadian Families and Households in 2006, 2006 Census,” 6.

¹⁷⁸ Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Young Adults,” 19.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

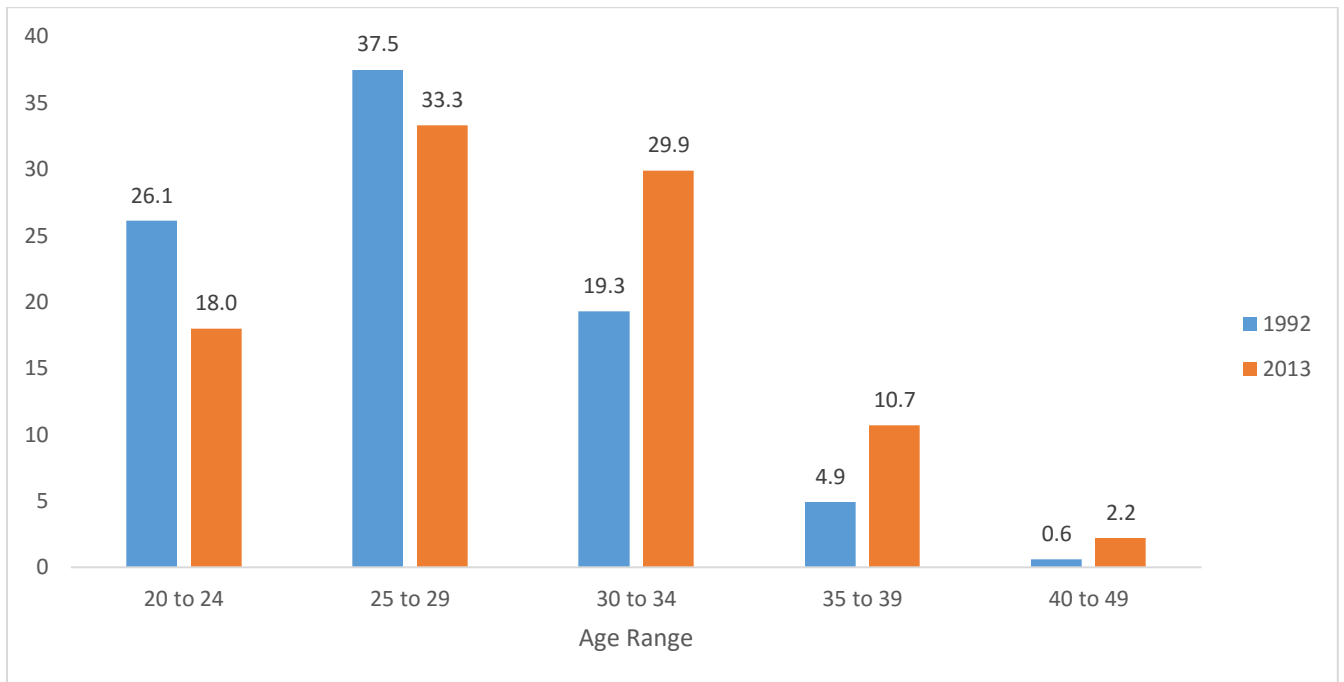
Family

Young adults are also delaying family formation. In 2011, the average age at first birth for Canadian women was 28.5 up from 23.5 in the mid-1960s.¹⁸⁰ Even though family formation is delayed, Bibby found that 94% of Millennials plan to have children, an increase from 85% in the early 1990s.¹⁸¹

Canadian women’s average age at first birth was five years higher in 2011, 28.5 years, than in the mid-1960s, 23.5 years.

Chart 3 shows the shift in the distribution of mothers’ ages at first birth from 1992 to 2013. A smaller percent of mothers ages 20 to 29 were having their first child in 2013 compared to 1992. In 2013, 42.8% of mothers having their first child were ages 30 to 49 compared to just 24.8% twenty years earlier.¹⁸²

Chart 3. Canadian Mothers’ Age at First Birth, 1992 and 2013, percent



Sources: “Trends in Canadian births, 1992 to 2012,” Statistics Canada, 2016. (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14314-eng.htm>), and “Trends in Canadian births 1993 to 2013,” Statistics Canada, (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2016001/article/14673-eng.htm>)

¹⁸⁰ Milan, “Fertility: Overview, 2009 to 2011,” 6.

¹⁸¹ Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice*, 2009, 199.

¹⁸² “Trends in Canadian Births”; Government of Canada, “Trends in Canadian Births, 1993 to 2013.”

Online Dating

Although emerging adults are delaying the formation of conjugal unions, they are not necessarily foregoing intimate relationships or dating. Social media and online dating are increasingly common.

Data on the use of online dating use by Canadian emerging adults is difficult to find and in many cases the online dating industry itself is the source.

Several Canadian media outlets, citing a 2011 Leger Marketing poll, claim that 36% of Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34 use online dating.¹⁸³ While the Leger polls seems to have been available to journalists at the time, this study's authors could not find it online.

According to the online dating site eHarmony.ca, "A quarter of all Canadians (ages 18-34) have tried online dating and 16% report they have had sex with someone they met online."¹⁸⁴ eHarmony.ca also claims that "20% of current, committed relationships began online."¹⁸⁵

eHarmony.ca's young adult online dating participation numbers, which were accessed in June 2017 but were not dated, are smaller than the 2011 Leger ones. Still the numbers are broadly in agreement with American Pew studies.

According to a 2015 Pew study, 27% of American 18- to 24-year-olds and 22% of 25- to 34-year-olds use online dating sites or mobile dating apps.¹⁸⁶ In 2015, the participation rate among 18- to 24-year-olds was 27%, an increase from 10% in 2013 – roughly triple in just two years.¹⁸⁷

Dating and courtship isn't just about online dating sites or dating apps. Social media is now the catalyst for romantic relationships. A 2013 Pew study found that 41% of American social media users age 18-29 used social media to get more information about someone they were dating, 17% used it to ask someone out on a date and 18% followed or "friended" someone because a friend suggested they might like to date that person.¹⁸⁸ Forty-eight percent of these same social media users used social media to check up on someone they used to be in a relationship with, and 31% posted details or pictures from a date.¹⁸⁹ On the more negative side, 41% unfriended or blocked someone who was flirting with them in a way that made them uncomfortable, 36% unfriended or blocked someone they used to be in a relationship with, and 36% untagged or deleted photos of someone they used to be in a relationship with.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ Goodyear, "2011 Sex Survey"; Staff, "By the Numbers."

¹⁸⁴ Thottam, "10 Online Dating Statistics You Should Know (CA)."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ "15% of American Adults Have Used Online Dating Sites or Mobile Dating Apps," 2.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, "15% of American Adults Have Used Online Dating Sites or Mobile Dating Apps," 2.

¹⁸⁸ Smith and Duggan, "Online Dating & Relationships," 35.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 36.

Gap Period

The 2003 cycle of the Canadian Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) looked at the transitions of young adults age 22 to 24 to postsecondary studies.¹⁹¹

The study found that about 40% were non-Gappers, 30% were Gappers and 30% had high school education or less.¹⁹²

Females were more likely (44%) than males (35%) to be non-Gappers, and overall about 75% of females and 64% of males had pursued postsecondary education by December 2003. Rural youth were slightly less likely to go on to higher education (62%) compared to urban youth (71%).¹⁹³

The Canadian Youth in Transition survey grouped young adults into three categories:

Gappers: Those who delayed starting postsecondary studies for more than four months after graduating from high school.

Non-Gappers: Those who went on to postsecondary studies within four months after graduating from high school.

Not Continuing: Those not continuing onto postsecondary education.

Potential Barriers to high school completion and post-secondary education attendance were:

- Working more than 20 hours a week in a paid job during the school year
- Extra-curricular activities: “young adults who spent 8 or more hours per week on these activities external to school saw their monthly change of going to postsecondary education (PSE) diminished by about 10%.”
- Friends: “High school graduates who said that only some, few or none of their close friends were planning on PSE had almost 40% less chance each month of going to PSE than their counterparts with most or all friends going to PSE.
- Changing High Schools: The chance of PSE attendance declines with each new high school attended.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Government of Canada, “Youth in Transition Survey (YITS).”

¹⁹² Hango, “Taking Time off between High School and Postsecondary Education: Determinants and Early Labour Market Outcomes.”

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Hango, “Delaying Post-Secondary Education,” 28–29.

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