

Understanding Our Students: Are They “Emerging Adults”?

Spring 2008

Discussion Questions

- 1) What is “emerging adulthood”? What are some of the characteristics of this developmental period?
- 2) How have you seen evidence of this phenomenon in your work with students?
- 3) What challenges and opportunities does “emerging adulthood” create for faculty members and others working at Malone College and in Christian higher education in general?

Arnett, J. J. (2007). Suffering, selfish, slackers? Myths and reality about emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 22-29.

Identity & Well-being

- Studies show increases in self-reported well-being from teens to mid twenties
- They are dealing with identity issues
- Some do have a “quarterlife crisis”
- “Thus, the variance in mental health functioning expands during emerging adulthood, improving for most people even as it declines precipitously for a small proportion” (p. 25).
- “By and large, emerging adults respond to the challenges of identity development not by collapsing into a quivering mass of fear but by making their way gradually toward laying the foundations for an adult life in love and work, with some anxiety but without trauma” (p. 24).
- Tend to be optimistic about their own possibilities, yet pessimistic about institutions and organizations (have “high hopes in a grim world”)

Selfish or Self-focused?

- Civic engagement and interest in political organizations has decreased
- Yet, rates of volunteerism have increased
- Self-focused because they are leaving families of origin but do not yet have a spouse or families of their own
- They understand that becoming less self-focused is a desirable part of becoming an adult

Refuse to Grow Up?

- Takes longer to become an adult than it did before
- More Americans attending college and graduate school
- They are ambivalent about growing up
- “They regard adulthood as attractive in some ways, in the security and stability it seems to promise and the increased status it confers. However, they also regard adult responsibilities as a mixed blessing” (p. 27).
- They have a “shrewd grasp of the realities of adult life” (p. 27)
- “By age 30, for better or worse, three-fourths have entered marriage and parenthood, nearly all have entered stable employment, nearly all have become financially independent, and hardly any live with their parents” (p. 28).