...the 20s are the time when you're finding out who you are. And so if you're ever going to be lost, 24 is the time to be seeking and finding yourself. So don't -- this is what I say to people in their 20s, don't beat yourself up about it... you always feel like you're not doing enough, you're not getting ahead. You wish you were doing more, and why -- why aren't things more settled? They're not supposed to be in your 20s.

– Oprah Winfrey

From *Larry King Live* (December 9, 2003), answering a caller's question regarding the 20s (full transcript, see call from Boonsboro, Maryland).
Three Ways ("Tripod") in Which Scholars Have Studied Young Adulthood

Milestones or Roles (Henig & Henig) and the Timing Thereof (Osgood et al.)

Layperson Opinions of Criteria for Adulthood (Arnett’s "Big Three")

Arnett’s Theory of Emerging Adulthood (Five Features re Exploration and Transition)
Although our course will focus on the relatively long time it takes many of today's youth to attain traditional adult roles, there were similar role-taking delays from roughly 1900-1940. Settersten and Ray (2010) note that: "Families of the 1950s and 1960s did many things differently from their predecessors, including launching themselves into adulthood at very early ages“ (p. 32). Thus, today's youth really stand in contrast to those of the '50s and '60s.

(Settersten, R. A., Jr., & Ray, B. [2010]. What’s going on with young people today? The long and twisting path to adulthood. Future of Children, 20, 19-41.)
Diversity of Paths Into Young Adulthood

Although on average many traditional adult milestones are not reached until the late 20s (or beyond), some people still achieve many of them in their early 20s.

Osgood and Colleagues’ (2004) Classification into Six Young-Adulthood Types Based on Timing of Milestone or Role Attainments

- Fast Starters
- Parents without Careers
- Educated Partners
- Educated Singles
- Working Singles
- Slow Starters
Possible reasons for the changes in more recent decades, which Arnett calls the “Four Revolutions” (textbook, pp. 2-8):

• **TECHNOLOGICAL:** Economy puts greater emphasis on “information and technology skills” (p. 4), increasing participation in higher education.

• **SEXUAL:** Birth control pill and changing societal attitudes about sex (2000 article from Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, marking the 40th anniversary of "The Pill").

• **WOMEN’S MOVEMENT:** Greater independence and educational-career orientation in women, compared to 50+ years ago.

• **YOUTH MOVEMENT:** Today’s young adults want to explore and enjoy their freedom, independence, and spontaneity. In contrast, the turmoil of the Great Depression (1930s) and World War II (1940s) made young people of that era eager to settle down.
Shift to Thinking About Attainment of Adulthood in Terms of One’s Mindset, Instead of Traditional Milestones

“Over the course of his research on this, [Jeffrey] Jensen Arnett has zeroed in on what he calls ‘the Big Three’ criteria for becoming an adult, the things people rank as what they most need to be a grown-up: taking responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. These three criteria have been ranked highly not just in the U.S., but in many other countries...”

-- When Are You Really an Adult?, The Atlantic (January 5, 2016)

Arnett, J. J. (2001). Conceptions of the transition to adulthood: Perspectives from adolescence through midlife. Journal of Adult Development, 8, 133-143. (See Table 2 and Figure 2)
Emerging Adulthood – The Guiding Framework for Our Course

Key quote (Arnett, 2000, *American Psychologist* article):

“Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 469).

Transition to Adulthood as a Process:
Not Accomplished in One Step, but a Series of Ongoing Developments

• Five features of EA (Arnett textbook, pp. 8-20, see especially Figure 1.6):
  o Identity exploration
  o Instability
  o Self-focus
  o Feeling in-between
  o Open possibilities

• Quotations from Jeff Arnett on NBC Today Show (August 24, 2010)
  o [Those in their 20s] generally make very good use of [their time]. They do a lot of interesting things with their 20s, things like join Teach for America, join the Peace Corps, try some interesting place to live or travel. They move to a different part of the country or the world to do something interesting for a while that they can only do while they don’t have adult responsibilities.
  o [Parents] need to worry if there is not a plan, if your emerging adult is not headed in any direction at all. If they’re trying something at least, even if it’s something that fails and they have to start again, they’re doing fine, and it may take them most of their 20s to find what they really want to do. But, if they don’t have a plan, if they seem depressed and defeated, then it’s time to worry.
Transition to Adulthood as a Process (Continued)

• Quotes from two chapters of 2011 book *Coming of Age in America* (edited by Waters, Carr, Kefalas, & Holdaway)
  
  o "...it is clear that young adults face a less scripted and more individualistic transition from teenager to full adult..." (Waters et al., p. 3).

  o "Most young people describe the process of entering adulthood as slow but ever upward, and as punctuated with 'adult moments' when individuals become conscious of the fact that they are crossing over into a new social category... Still others, though fewer, describe the process of becoming adult as [one that includes]... some experiences propelling them forward and others setting them back" (Settersten, p. 189).

• Emerging Adulthood questionnaire (IDEA; Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007)
  
  o Seeks to capture differences in outlook between people transitioning to adulthood
  o Article *introducing the IDEA*, containing statistics to compare yourself to
## Critiques of the Concept of Emerging Adulthood

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<tr>
<th>Critique</th>
<th>Arnett’s Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept of EA is <strong>not new</strong>; previous authors have written about similar ideas, just with different names (e.g., Henig &amp; Henig)</td>
<td>Attempts to distinguish EA from these other concepts (2015 textbook, pp. 20-24).</td>
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<td>Hendry and Kloep: (Regardless of age) “most of us are almost always in the state of being in between or emerging” (p. 75).</td>
<td>&quot;...more than any other period of life, emerging adulthood presents the possibility of change“ (Arnett, 2004, p. 17).</td>
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<td>H &amp; K: EA is “limited to a certain age cohort in certain societies at a certain historical time with particular socioeconomic conditions” (p. 76).</td>
<td>“Eventually, the theory of emerging adulthood may be displaced by other theories as cultures and economies change in ways we cannot imagine today, but for the foreseeable future it will be an increasingly useful framework and model for the lives of young people ...” (Arnett, 2007, p. 81).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kimmel: &quot;In an ideal world, [Arnett's notion of EA development] might be a dream trajectory. Yet Arnett's view of this stage of life is so sanguine, so sanitized, it's hardly recognizable. It's hard to square such serious self-reflection with the bacchanalian atmosphere of a college weekend...&quot; (p. 39)</td>
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<td>Kimmel: &quot;One reason Jeffrey Arnett and his colleagues can be so sanguine about emerging adulthood is because there is nary a word about gender in their work. But how can one possibly discuss the age group 16 to 26 and not talk about gender? It's the most gendered stage of a person's development...&quot; (p. 41)</td>
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### Critiques of EA (Continued)

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<th>Lerner: “The core idea of classical stage theory is that all people — underscore ‘all’ — pass through a series of qualitatively different periods in an invariant and universal sequence in stages that can’t be skipped or reordered...” <em>(New York Times</em> magazine, p. 8)</th>
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<td>&quot;When [the Times reporter] asked Arnett what happens to people who don’t have an emerging adulthood, he said it wasn’t necessarily a big deal. They might face its developmental tasks ... at a later time, maybe as a midlife crisis, or they might never face them at all, he said. It depends partly on why they missed emerging adulthood in the first place, whether it was by circumstance or by choice.”</td>
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<td>Côté: Primarily criticizes Arnett for overstating prevalence of EA narrative, with a focus on social class: &quot;Economists refer to unstable youth work histories as ‘churning,’ but Arnett reduces the churning experienced by many young people to freely chosen ‘identity explorations’ with various types of jobs rather than seeing their actions as coping with precarious, ambiguous, and exploitive job situations&quot; <em>(p. 184).</em></td>
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Internet Resources

• Chart of [Erikson's lifespan stages](#) (EA would fall between Stages V & VI)
• Dr. Reifman's [Emerging Adulthood blog](#)
• [Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood](#)
• [Jeffrey Arnett's EA Website](#)
• Interesting statistical charts from National Center for Family & Marriage Research on [attainment of adult roles](#) by the mid-20s