Are university students adults? 
Utilizing the theory of emerging adulthood to support student success

Workshop for the NACADA International Conference, Sheffield
10\textsuperscript{th} July 2017

Facilitator:

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Order of the workshop

- Welcome to the workshop
- Objectives exercise: what do you hope to learn today? Share today?
- What is emerging adulthood?
  - Discussion of theory
  - Our own view of college students
  - Dissection of the 5 ‘ages’ of emerging adulthood
At the end of the workshop:

- Sharing current practices
- Mini document analysis
- Planning possible future activities on your own campus
Welcome to this workshop

- About your facilitator
- Introduce yourselves!
- The motivation behind this workshop
- House keeping reminders
Exercise 1: What are your objectives for today’s workshop?

- Please read and complete Worksheet 1
- What are your objectives today?
- What do you hope to learn?
- What do you hope to share during the workshop?
Let’s talk theory
Theoretical understandings of student development

Student development theory is:

- A way to categorize the theory and research on late-adolescent and adult development
- Specifically related to how young people change during the college years
- Philosophy which guides practice in student affairs and student support services
- EA is not included in the canon of student development theory literature

Two questions that are prompted:

- What do students ‘bring to the table’ in terms of their own development during the university years?
- Have students reached adulthood? During college? After college?
This leads to the question....

Just what is an adult?
Are students adults?

- Place yourself along the continuum on the wall – where do you fit? What is your own belief?

- Pair up with the person at the same point (or near the same point) as you.

- Take a few minutes to share your views about students and adulthood.
Discussion – ‘but they’re adults, right?’

- In collecting data from parents of 1st Engineering students at University College Dublin in 2009/2010, there’s a very confusing picture
  - No consensus on what constitutes ‘adulthood’
    - Age? Social marker?
  - Mixed views on whether universities should treat students as adults
  - Parents have very mixed views if their own students are adults
  - Students often see themselves as ‘emerging adults’ (Arnett, 2004)
The space between adolescence and adulthood

- Traditionally, we think of development as linear, moving from childhood to adolescence to adulthood in stages (Eriksonian view).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Psychosocial crisis</th>
<th>Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Infancy</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Birth - 1½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Early childhood</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame</td>
<td>1½ – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Play age</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 School age</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>6-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Adolescence</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role Confusion</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Early adulthood</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>20-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Middle adulthood</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
<td>35-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Late adulthood</td>
<td>Ego Integrity vs. Despair</td>
<td>65+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As people remain in education longer, and delay marriage, the transition from childhood to adulthood is no longer as clear cut as it was in the past.

Arnett proposed a new and distinct life stage for understanding the shifts between adolescence and adulthood: emerging adulthood.

May be distinctions between social classes (Arnett, 2011; Laureau and Weininger, 2008) and cultures other than America.
Emerging Adulthood

- Emerging adulthood is characterised by five main features or ages:
  - The age of identity explorations
  - The age of instability
  - Age of life when we are most self-focused
  - Age of feeling in-between
  - Age of possibilities (Arnett, 2004, p. 8)

*New college students must manage an ongoing tension between interdependence and independence*(Smith, Carmack & Titsworth, 2006).

University students can be best described as “adults by many yardsticks, and yet not quite”....
Ages of emerging adulthood

- Instability
- Possibilities
- Feeling in-between
- Self-focus
- Identity explorations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling in-between</th>
<th>Neither adolescents nor adults; emerging adults realise that their parents are no longer responsible for deciding how they will live and can thus struggle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity exploration</td>
<td>Explore possibilities, especially in the areas of love and work; will often try out different college choices and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability</td>
<td>No set plans for education, accommodation, etc.; most have a ‘Plan’ but there are often changes/revisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-focus</td>
<td>Unlikely to have commitments to others, such as dependent children or aging parents; allows EAs to begin building a foundation for their adult lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibilities</td>
<td>‘high hopes and great expectations’; likely the first time to experience sufficient autonomy to direct their future life paths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Features of EA

- All five ages are equally weighted and all ages must be present for an individual to be considered an 'emerging adult' (Arnett, 2000).
- Emerging adulthood is part of a sequential stage theory of human development (Erikson), the five ages (features) of emerging adulthood are not sequential.
- Significant stage as an individual’s life course can be redirected in emerging adulthood, both positively and negatively (Schwartz, 2016).
Please pair up and discuss the ‘age’ assigned to you – think of an example.

How do you experience this ‘age’ in your work with students?

What is challenging about this ‘age’ of emerging adulthood?

Do you have an example of your own practice in which to support students displaying this ‘age’?
Understanding students as emerging adults

Pros (positive)  Cons (negative)
However…..

- Also the age of onset of
  - Mental health difficulties
  - Civic and political disengagement
  - Focus on consumerism: ‘gimme what I want’
  - Shadow side of sexual liberation
  - Intoxication’s ‘fake feeling of happiness’
    (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Herzog, 2011)

- In Ireland, data from the My World survey shows these issues in an Irish context
- Social media’s impact on ‘continuous happiness’
Implications for universities

- Adulthood doesn’t happen overnight (nor do students step foot on campus and instantaneously become adults) (Apter, 2001)

- Small number of parents who do not see their sons or daughters as adults can be problematic

- the ‘inexact science’ of determining when young people become adults (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011).

- For parents who regard university students as children, rather than adults, these parents may become more involved in their students’ lives and wanting more contact from the case study university (Daniel et al., 2001).
Implications for university students?

• New college students must manage an ongoing tension between interdependence and independence (Smith, Carmack & Titsworth, 2006).

• Inherent dichotomy in emerging adulthood: Legally adult by age but... Students often see themselves as ‘emerging adults’ (Arnett, 2004)

• Parents of students want more contact from their son’s or daughter’s university. Students and parents may need to come to an agreement about sharing information, independence, etc (Doyle, 2017; Hunt, 2008; Shoup, Gonyea, & Kuh, 2009; Taylor, 2011).
Claire: Mother of a male student  (Doyle 2017)

- Coping
- independence

- Not in 1st year

What is adult?

College students adults?

Is your student adult?

Should uni treat students as adults?

- No!
- Yes!
Document analysis

What clues can you find as to how your unit/university, etc expects students to behave?
‘one idea to take home’

- What idea will you take to your home institution?
Thank you!

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Please complete and return evaluations forms before you leave.

Thank you!
Sources cited


