
Emerging Adulthood: Psychosocial Development

Chapter Preview

Biologically mature and no longer bound by parental authority, the emerging adult typically is now free to choose a particular path of development. Today, the options are incredibly varied. Not surprisingly, then, the hallmark of psychosocial development during emerging adulthood is diversity. Nevertheless, developmentalists have identified several themes or patterns that help us understand the course of development between the ages of 20 and 40.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the two basic identity statuses of emerging adulthood: ethnic identity and vocational identity. Ethnic identity is difficult to achieve for those who must reconcile their ethnic background with their new social context.

College education is an important stimulus for the development of vocational identity for many emerging adults. The final section addresses the need for intimacy in adulthood, focusing on the development of friendship, love, and marriage.

What Have You Learned?

The “What Have You Learned?” questions at the end of the text chapter are reprinted here for your convenience in checking students' understanding of the chapter contents.

1. How is attending college a moratorium?
2. How does ethnic pride change from early adolescence to adulthood?
3. Why are many emerging adults quite specific about their ethnic heritage?
4. How are romantic preferences related to ethnicity?
5. How does college help or hinder the development of vocational identity?
6. Why might vocational identity be an “outdated social construction”?
7. Which personality factors foster continuity and which encourage change?
8. What is the general trend of self-esteem during emerging adulthood?
9. How does the Internet affect friendship?
10. What gender differences in friendship are typical among men and among women?
11. What are the advantages and disadvantages of male–female friendships?
12. What do emerging adults seek in a romantic partner?
13. What are the three dimensions of love, according to Sternberg?
14. How has social networking changed the process of mate selection?
15. Why do many emerging adults cohabit instead of marrying?
16. What does most research conclude about the long-term effects of cohabitation?
17. What happens when couples choose partners who are unlike themselves?

18. Why is demand/withdraw interaction particularly destructive of a relationship?
19. When are counseling and mediation likely to succeed with intimate partner violence?
20. When is immediate protection and separation needed in intimate partner violence?
21. What are the gender differences in intimate partner violence?
22. Why do people assume that emerging adults are not influenced by their parents?
23. What kinds of support do parents provide their young-adult children?
24. How is family interaction affected when young adults live in their parents' homes?

Chapter Guide

- “On Your Own” Activities: Developmental Fact or Myth?; Portfolio Assignment
- AV: The Journey Through the Life Span, Program 7: Early Adulthood; Transitions Throughout the Life Span, Program 19: Early Adulthood: Psychosocial Development
- “On Your Own” Activity: When Should You . . . ?
- Observational Activity: The “Right Time” for Life Events

I. Continuity and Change

Instructional Objective: *To describe the ongoing search for identity during emerging adulthood, focusing on ethnic and vocational identity.*

- AV: Careers and Babies
 - Classroom Activities: Using the Secret Identities of Superheroes to Illustrate Identity Conflict; The Changing Workplace
 - Teaching Tip: Vocational Identity
1. The identity crisis sometimes causes confusion, diffusion, foreclosure, or what is perhaps a more mature response of seeking a moratorium. Examples of moratoria include college, military service, religious mission work, apprenticeships, and internships.
 2. In the United States and Canada, almost half of emerging adults are of African, Asian, Latino, or Native American heritage. Most of them identify with specific ethnic groups. Identity achievement is particularly difficult for immigrants because it means reconciling their parents' background with their new social context.
 3. Ethnic identity is complex for three reasons: It is reciprocal, it depends on context and therefore changes with time and circumstances, and it is multifaceted.
 4. For many emerging adults, attending college is an important step toward achieving vocational identity. The correlation between college education and income is stronger today than in the past. This is because there are fewer unskilled jobs and more knowledge-based jobs.
 5. In the United States today, the average worker between the ages of 18 and 27 has held eight jobs. For this and other reasons, many developmentalists wonder whether achieving a vocational identity today is possible.
 6. Although the origins of personality are genetic, personality is not static. After adolescence, new dimensions may appear and negative traits may diminish.
 7. Research studies generally show that transitions such as entering college or getting a job are accompanied by increased well-being.
 8. Shifts toward positive development are especially apparent among emerging adults who, as children, displayed extreme shyness or marked aggression. These findings demonstrate plasticity in development.

II. Intimacy

Instructional Objective: To discuss how adults meet the need for intimacy through friendship and sexual partnership, and to highlight the issues involved in making a relationship work.

- AV: Gender and Relationships; Love, Love Me, Do: How Sex Differences Affect Relationships; Portrait of a Family: Modules 2 (Forming Relationships) and 3 (The Marriage Partnership); Clinical Dilemmas in Marriage: The Search for Equal Partnership
 - Classroom Activities: “Seeing It” Both Ways; An Historical Look at Marriage
 - “On Your Own” Activity: Marriages Made to Last
 - Critical Thinking Activity: Explaining Changing Trends in the Age of Marriage
 - Internet Activity: Trends in Cohabitation, Marriage, and Divorce
1. Erikson described the crisis of emerging adulthood in terms of **intimacy versus isolation**. Other terms used by theorists to refer to intimacy are affiliation, affection, interdependence, communion, belonging, and love. The most recent theory notes that an important aspect of close human connections is self-expansion.
 2. Probably because friends choose one another, they are even more important than family members for providing companionship and critical support.
 3. Thanks to technology, nonromantic friendships between men, between women, and between a man and a woman can last a lifetime.
 4. Friendships between men are often based on shared activities and interests, and discussions center on external matters; those between women tend to be more intimate and emotional, based on shared confidences and practical assistance in times of crisis.
 5. Male–female friendships that usually do not lead to romance are more frequent among today’s emerging adults.
 6. Worldwide, couples today marry later and divorce more often than earlier cohorts did.
 7. (A Case to Study) In most nations, marriage is not based on romantic love.
 8. According to Robert Sternberg, love has three components: passion, intimacy, and commitment. The relative presence or absence of these three components gives rise to seven different forms of love. Early in a typical relationship, passion is high, but because the partners have not shared enough time and experiences, intimacy and commitment are low.
 9. When commitment is added to passion and intimacy, the result is the Western ideal of consummate love.
 10. Sexual encounters between two people in which neither intimacy or commitment are expected are called **hookups**. The desire for this type of arrangement may be stronger in young men than in young women and more common among first-year students than among those about to graduate.
 11. **Social networking** Web sites such MySpace and Facebook allow users to connect with others, including potential sexual partners. Two potential problems with technology in matchmaking are the difficulty in assessing passion without meeting in person and **choice overload**.
 12. (text and Critical Thinking) The practice of **cohabitation** among young adults has increased worldwide. About half of cohabiting young adults in the United States consider cohabitation to be a prelude to, rather than a replacement for, marriage. Cohabitants tend to be younger, poorer, and more likely to end their relationship than married couples—even when the relationship is quite satisfying. Also, domestic violence is more common among cohabiting couples.
 13. Anthropologists distinguish between **homogamy**, marriage between individuals who are similar in attitudes, interests, goals, socioeconomic background, religion, ethnic group, and other variables, and **heterogamy**, or marriage between individuals who are dissimilar in these respects. Similarity in leisure interests and role preferences (**social homogamy**) is particularly important to marital success.

14. No relationship is always smooth, but conflict is less predictive of separation than disgust because disgust closes down intimacy. One particularly destructive pattern of conflict is ***demand/withdraw interaction***.
15. Violence in intimate relationships is more common among emerging adults than among those over 25.
16. Many factors contribute to domestic abuse, including youth, poverty, personality, mental illness, and drug and alcohol addiction. In addition, many sexually abused children, children who are harshly punished, and children who witness regular spousal assault grow up to be abusers or victims themselves.
17. ***Situational couple violence*** occurs when both partners fight and yet both are sometimes caring and affectionate. ***Intimate terrorism*** occurs when one partner, usually the man, uses a range of methods to isolate, degrade, and punish the other. This form of violence, for which there is almost no hope, leads to the *battered-wife syndrome*.
18. Family connection is a crucial part of an emerging adult's life. All members of each family have ***linked lives***, meaning that the experiences and needs of family members at one stage of life are affected by those at other stages.