

PART V



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EARLY AND MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

This three-chapter part spans the time from high school graduation until society labels us senior citizens (our sixties) — a lifespan chunk that covers almost a half-century!

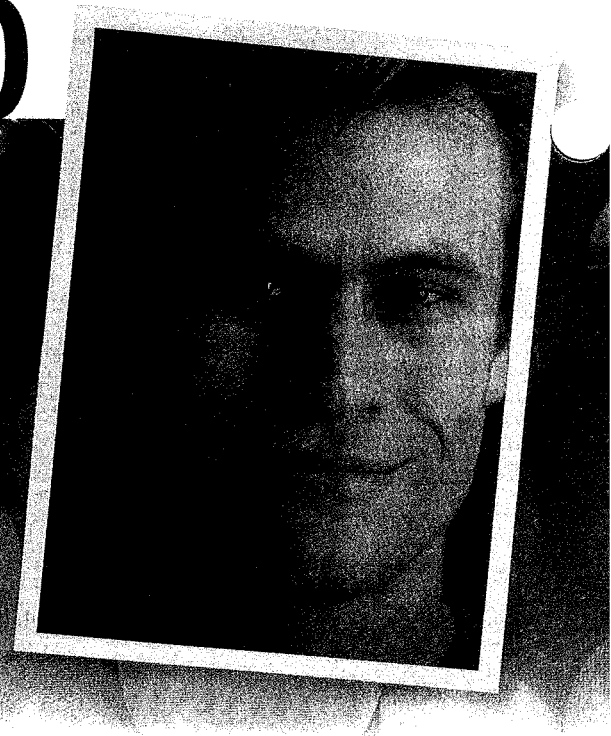
Chapter 10 — Constructing an Adult Life tackles the challenges of making it to full adulthood. Here, I'll discuss leaving home, developing an identity, negotiating college, choosing a career, and finding love. This chapter concludes with an in-depth look at how social media affects the blossoming self. If you are an emerging adult, this chapter is for you!

Chapter 11 — Social Development: Relationships and Roles continues my focus on love and work by exploring marriage, parenthood, and careers. In the marriage section, I'll scan marriage ideas around the world, explore how marriages (and love relationships) evolve, and offer insights into how to connect lovingly for life. Then you'll find out how becoming parents changes couples, and learn what

twenty-first-century motherhood and fatherhood are like. The last section of the chapter examines work: How has our career path changed? What makes for happiness in this vital role? How do men's and women's work pathways differ? What is the impact of unemployment on mental health?

Chapter 12 — Midlife covers our longest life stage, spanning from the forties to the mid-sixties. Here, my focus is, "How do people change over adulthood?" As I survey the research on sexuality, scan intellectual and emotional development, and explore wisdom and happiness, you'll get insights into what makes a fulfilling adult life. The last sections of this chapter cover roles typical of middle age: grandparenthood and caring for elderly parents.

CHAPTER 10



Constructing an Adult Life

After graduating from high school, Declan looked forward to college. But his freshman year at State U was a nightmare. His courses felt irrelevant. He zoned out during lectures. Compared to high school, the work seemed impossibly hard. And after struggling to balance his full-time supermarket job with five classes a semester, he lost his scholarship after the first year. The only rational solution was to drop out and move in with his parents, so he could save money and consider going back.

Six years later, Declan had enough money to move out of the house. He was promoted to store supervisor (with health insurance!). He met a terrific woman named Prithy on a dating app. They plan to get married in a few years—if they both can get well-paying jobs.

Prithy and Declan share values, even though his background differs from her South Asian roots. He respects Prithy's strong work ethic and the fact that she cares for her immigrant grandparents while going to nursing school. Should Declan return to State U and get an online business degree? Will having a B.A. allow him to find a job where he can work from home? At 28, it's crunch-time to get serious about life.

Can you identify with Declan's anxieties about finishing college? Perhaps, like Prithy, you are trying to balance family demands while getting your degree. No matter what your

situation, if you are in your twenties, you probably feel “in between.” You are not a child, but probably haven't reached those classic adult goals—marriage, parenthood, embarking on your “real” career. You fit

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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that life stage Jeffrey Arnett (2004, 2007) labels **emerging adulthood**.

This chapter is devoted to this new life phase. It explores the decade lasting from age 18 to our late twenties, when we are constructing an adult life. First,

I'll examine the features of emerging adulthood and describe the challenges we face during this pivotal, transitional age. Then I'll focus on three crucial emerging-adult concerns: college, career, and finding love.

emerging adulthood The phase of life that begins after high school, lasts through the late twenties, and is devoted to constructing an adult life.

Setting the Context

Emerging adulthood is not a universal life stage. It occurs for young people living at this point in history in the affluent world. Its goal is exploration — trying out options before committing to adult life. Although they want to *eventually* get married (Cherlin, 2020; Sassler & Lichter, 2020), most emerging adults are not ready to settle down. They don't feel financially secure. They may move from job to job, enter and then exit college or a parent's home, and test out relationships before they find a life-mate (Arnett, 2016).

Exploring different possibilities defines emerging adulthood. Its other core quality is exuberant optimism about what lies ahead (Franceschelli & Keating, 2018; Silva, 2016). Emerging adults are at their physical peak. Their reasoning abilities are in top form. Still, the challenges people face during this watershed age are more daunting than at any other life stage.

We Need to Re-center Our Lives Our parents protect us during adolescence. Now, our task is to take control of ourselves and act like “real adults” (Tanner & Arnett, 2010). We used to count on marriage, parenthood, and supporting a family to make us feel adult. No more! Since only a tiny minority of contemporary U.S. young people have entered these adult roles by age 25 (Cherlin, 2020; see Figure 10.1), most people now view the criteria for reaching adulthood in internal terms: Adults accept responsibility for their actions; adults financially support themselves; adults make independent decisions about life (Arnett, 2016).

We Have Entered an Unstructured, Unpredictable Path During adolescence, high school organizes our days. We wake up, go to class; we are on an identical track. Then, at age 18, our lives diverge. Many of us go to college; others enter the world of work. Emerging adults live alone or with friends, stay with their parents or move far away. For some emerging adults, constructing an adult life takes decades. For people who have children and enter their work lives by age 18, there may be no emerging adulthood at all. So emerging adulthood is defined by variability as we set sail on our own. Why did this structure-free stage emerge?

Culture and History

Our twentieth-century longevity gains made emerging adulthood possible. Imagine reaching adulthood a century ago. With an average life expectancy in the fifties (Gordon, 2015), you could not have the luxury of spending a decade constructing an adult life. Now, with life expectancy floating up to the late seventies and beyond in affluent nations (see Chapter 1), putting off adult commitments until an older age makes excellent sense.

Learning Outcomes

- List the core emerging-adult challenges.
- Outline the historical forces that have shaped emerging adulthood, and how this life stage varies across southern Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States.
- Describe nest-leaving changes and social clock issues.

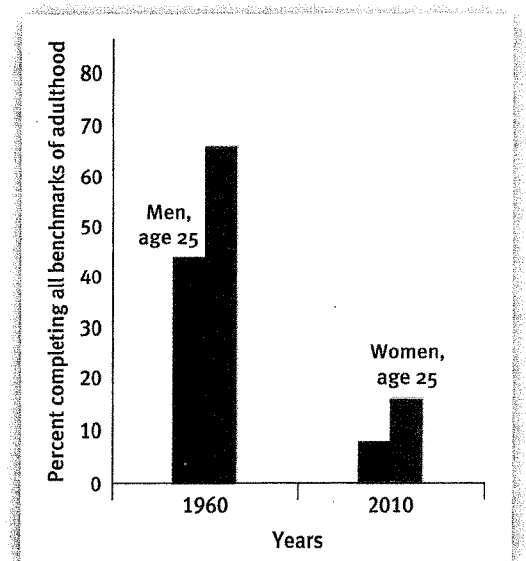


Figure 10.1: Young men (blue bars) and women (red bars) in the United States completing the classic “benchmarks of adulthood” at age 25, in 1960 and 2010 This chart documents the mammoth shift in our passage to adulthood over half a century. In 1960, by their mid-twenties most people had finished school, started a career, gotten married, and had children. Now, we see 25 as far “too young” to reach these standard adult goals!

Data from Furstenberg, 2015

Education made emerging adulthood likely. A half-century ago, high school graduates could get high-paying jobs. Today, in the United States, we see college as crucial to career success (Silva, 2016). But, although most emerging adults enter college, it can take more than four years to get an undergraduate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). If we add in graduate school, constructing a career takes until the mid-twenties and beyond (Furstenberg, 2015).

Emerging adulthood was promoted by the realization that staying married for life and finding well-paying work can be elusive. It took hold in a late-twentieth-century Western culture that stresses self-expression and “doing your own thing,” in which people make dramatic changes *throughout* their adult years.

Longevity, education, and an uncertain modern life propelled emerging adulthood. Still, the forces that drive this life stage vary from place to place. For snapshots of this variability, let’s travel to southern Europe and Scandinavia, and then enter the United States.

The Mediterranean Model: Living with Parents and Making a More Leisurely Leap to Adult Life

In southern Europe, the main impediment to reaching adulthood is chronically high youth unemployment rates (Crocetti & Tagliabue, 2016; Dvouletý, Lukeš, & Vancea, 2020). In these nations, the cultural norms traditionally discourage **cohabitation**, or living together without being married. So in Italy, Spain, and Greece, as well as Portugal, most people expect to spend their twenties and early thirties in their parents’ house (Mendonça & Fontaine, 2013; Smorti, Ponti, & Cincidda, 2020). In these less affluent EU countries, religious and financial pressures have forced a protracted pace into adult life.

The Scandinavian Plan: Living Independently with Government Help

These cultural conditions do not exist in Scandinavia, where jobs are more plentiful and getting married is a personal choice (Cherlin, 2020; Sassler & Lichter, 2020). In Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, the government funds university attendance. A strong social safety net provides free health care and other benefits to citizens of every age. So in northern Europe, **nest-leaving** — moving out of a parent’s home to live independently — can begin at the brink of the emerging-adult years. In the Nordic nations, the twenties are a time for exploring life before having children, and then *perhaps* deciding to marry a life love (Cherlin, 2020).

The United States: Colliding Conceptions, Diverse Paths, and a Recent (Reluctant) Return to Multigenerational Life

Emerging adulthood in the United States has some features of both Scandinavia and southern Europe. As in the Nordic nations, a high fraction of U.S. women now give birth without being married (Cherlin, 2020). However, like their southern European counterparts, U.S. young people view being married as an important life goal (Konstam, 2019; more about this in Chapter 11). The U.S.

traditional individualistic culture expects people to move out of their parents’ home after high school; but this same focus on self-reliance means that, unlike in Scandinavia, the government doesn’t pay for college and, in recent decades, emerging adults have trouble finding decent jobs.

cohabitation Sharing a household in an unmarried romantic relationship.

nest-leaving Moving out of one’s childhood home and living independently.



In a Scandinavian family, parents might happily cohabit for decades without feeling they need a wedding ring. In the United States and southern Europe, we view a marriage ceremony as a pinnacle life event!

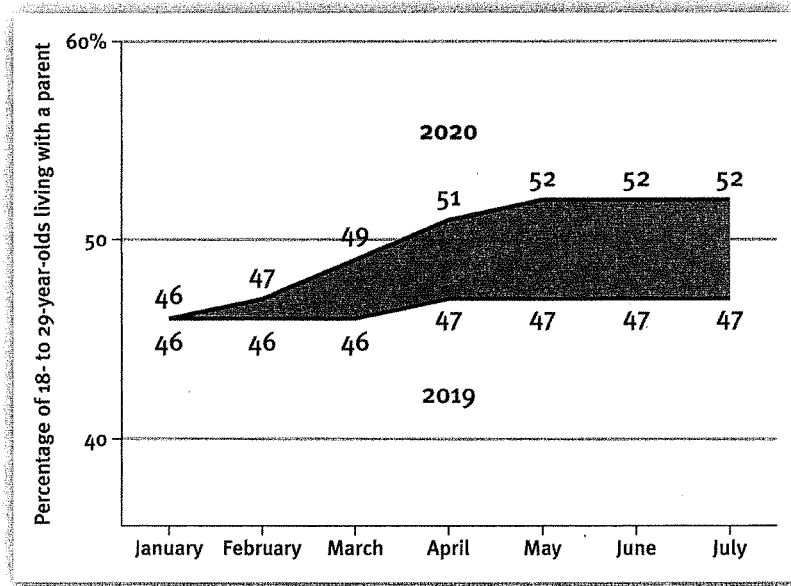


Figure 10.2: COVID-19 era increase in U.S. twenty-somethings living with parents While emerging adults of color have always been more likely to live intergenerationally, in 2020, as the chart shows, we reached a milestone—*most* emerging adults either returned to or remained in the nest.

Information from Fry, Passel, & Cohn, 2020

The reality is that these colliding conceptions, combined with dramatic *income inequalities*, produce sharp social-class differences in how U.S. emerging adults construct an adult life. Because people are reluctant to get married until they can support a family, marriage in the United States has become an upper middle-class achievement. Low-income adults often travel through life without a spouse (Cherlin, 2020; Sassler & Licther, 2020). And, with the COVID crisis, we are reluctantly relinquishing our traditional first marker of becoming adult—moving out of our parents' house at 18. In 2020, as Figure 10.2 shows, for the first time since the Great Depression, more than half of all U.S. people moved back in with their families during the emerging adult years.

Exploring the Traditional Entry Point: Nest-Leaving

Actually, in the United States and northern Europe, moving away from our parents has always qualified as an important rite of passage. It removes the clashes around independence that define the teenage years (see Chapter 9). Most important, it forces young people to care for themselves. Listen to this British mother gushing about her 20-year-old daughter: "I'm real proud of her. . . . I'd expected to be a laundry and maid service . . . , but fair play, she's done all [the] washing and cleaning" (quoted in Kloep & Hendry, 2010, p. 824).

Does leaving home really produce better family relationships? Does living independently force young people to "grow up"?

Does Leaving Home Produce Better Parent–Child Relationships?

Here, U.S. research suggested that the answer is often yes. In longitudinal studies conducted during the early twenty-first century, both young people and their parents reported less conflict when children left the nest (Morgan, Thorne, & Zubriggen, 2010). However, this is not true in vast swaths of the world, where living independently is *not* a cultural goal (see Chapter 7). In Portugal, one study showed that parents got more agitated when their children moved out of the house! (See Mendonça & Fontaine, 2013.)

Does Leaving Home Make People More Adult?

Here, too, previous studies in the United States and northern Europe implied the answer is yes. When Belgian researchers compared young people in their early twenties who never left home with a same-age group who moved out, the “nest residents” felt more emotionally dependent on their parents and were less satisfied with life (Kins & Beyers, 2010). One emerging adult spelled out his feelings: “[It] is comparable to living in a hotel actually. I have no charges . . . My meals are prepared, my laundry is done” (quoted in Kins, de Mol, & Beyers, 2014, p. 104). Another British mother put it graphically: “He is my . . . mummy’s boy. . . And ’cos he lives at home . . . I do his clothes, . . . tidy his room, . . . even still do packed lunch” (quoted in Kloep & Hendry, 2010, p. 826).

These quotes reinforce our culture’s classic negative images about emerging adults who stay in the nest: They are lazy, babyish, unwilling to grow up. The problem is that today in the United States, not moving out during emerging adulthood can be a *prudent* strategy for constructing an adult life. Young people decide to live at home for very grown-up reasons: to ease the financial pressures on their families and themselves!

So is nest-leaving still the beginning of emerging adulthood? Not anymore. Do young people *need* to live independently to act mature? The answer is definitely no. Parents’ task is to construct adult-to-adult relationships with their children no matter where the younger generation lives (see Table 10.1 for suggestions). Young people’s challenge is to assemble the building blocks to construct a satisfying adult life. And our culture needs to adapt to the reality that multigenerational households may be far more “normal” for U.S. adults as the twenty-first century unfolds!

When does society feel we should finish constructing an adult life? The answer brings up a classic concept in adult development.

Exploring the Fuzzy End Point: The Ticking of the Social Clock

Our feelings about when we should get our adult lives in order reflect our culture’s **social clock** (Neugarten, 1972, 1979). This phrase refers to shared **age norms** that act as guideposts to what behaviors are appropriate at particular ages. If our passage matches up with the typical timetable in our society, we are defined as **on time**; if not, we are **off time** — either too early or too late for where we should be at a given age.

So, in the twenty-first-century West, exploring different options is considered on time during our twenties, but these activities become off time if they extend well

social clock The concept that we regulate our passage through adulthood by referring to our society’s timetable that tells us which life activities are appropriate at certain ages.

age norms Cultural ideas about the appropriate ages to engage in particular activities or life tasks.

on time Being on target in a culture’s timetable for achieving adult life tasks.

off time Being too late or too early in a culture’s timetable for achieving adult life tasks.

Table 10.1: Tips for Getting Along as Co-residing Parent/Child Adults

1. **For parents:** Don’t micromanage, hover, or nag (texting or calling) when your child comes home “late.” Support your child’s goals and encourage your son or daughter to make a financial contribution to the family, as subsidizing everything reinforces the impression that this young person is still a child (Nelson & Luster, 2016).
2. **For children:** Resist being babied (and totally subsidized) but lean on your parents for emotional support. If you have a sense of purpose, you are apt to feel “adult” and close to your parents, even if you are living “at home” (see Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2016).
3. **For parents and children:** Talk openly about your concerns and set up shared rules: How will you divide household tasks? Is living together contingent on staying in school or searching for a job? Then vow to treat each other like loving adults.
4. **And finally, for U.S. families:** Understand that the traditional leaving-home benchmarks no longer apply. Staying in the nest during the twenties is no longer a sign of personal failure, but a practical choice.

into the next decade of life. A parent whose 35-year-old son is “just dating” and shows no signs of deciding on a career may become impatient: “Will my child *ever* grow up?” A woman traveling into her mid-thirties may get uneasy: “I’d better hurry up if I want a family,” or “Do I still have time to go to medical school?” Although emerging adults *say* they view adulthood in internal terms, feeling seriously off time in the late direction causes considerable distress (Nelson & Luster, 2016).

The problem, however, is that social-clock agendas are not totally under control. People cannot “decide” to find the love of their life at a defined age. This sense of being “out of control” may explain why emerging adulthood is both an exhilarating *and* emotionally challenging time. On the positive side, as I mentioned earlier, emerging adults are optimistic about their futures (Silva, 2016). On the negative side, the twenties are the life stage when anxiety disorders reach their peak (Schwartz, 2016).

For some young people, the issue is failing to take responsibility. As one emerging adult anguished: “My life looks like a . . . gutter and effort to fight that gutter . . . then back in the gutter . . . I just don’t have any control over myself” (quoted in Macek, Bejcek, & Vanickova, 2007, p. 466). For others, there may be romantic heartbreaks or understanding that your career dreams can’t be fulfilled (more about both issues soon). Or emerging adults may not have clues about where they want to go in life: “We do have more possibilities . . . but that’s why it’s harder” . . . “You study and you wonder what it is good for” (quoted in Macek, Bejcek, & Vanickova, 2007, p. 468). The reason for this inner turmoil is that, during emerging adulthood, we undergo a mental makeover. We decide *who* to be as adults.



When this not-so-young man in his forties finally proposed to his longtime girlfriend, both their families were probably thrilled. Feeling “off time” in the late direction in your social-clock timetable can cause everyone considerable distress.

Tying It All Together

- Imagine you decide to be a fortune-teller at your friend Hui’s eighteenth birthday party, offering predictions about what the next years have in store for her. Given your understanding of emerging adulthood, which would *not* be a safe prediction?
 - Hui will not reach the standard markers of adulthood for many years.
 - Hui will graduate from college in four years.
 - Hui will live at home at some point during her twenties.
- Staying in the nest during the twenties today is a “symptom” of a child’s refusing to grow up — *true* or *false*?
- Which person is most apt to worry about a social-clock issue: Beatriz, age 45, who wants to apply to nursing school, or Sigge, age 32, who has just become a father?

Answers to the Tying It All Together questions can be found at the end of this chapter.

Constructing an Identity

Erik Erikson was the theorist who highlighted the challenge of transforming our childhood self into the person we become as adults. He named this process the search for **identity** (see Table 10.2).

Time spent wandering through Europe to find himself sensitized Erikson to the difficulties young people face in constructing an adult self. Erikson’s fascination with identity, however, crystallized when he worked in a psychiatric hospital for troubled teens. Erikson discovered that young patients suffered from a problem he

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the different identity statuses.
- Examine ethnic identity.

identity In Erikson’s theory, the life task of deciding who to be as an adult.

Table 10.2: Erikson's Psychosocial Stages (Adolescence/Emerging Adulthood)

Life Stage	Primary Task
Infancy (birth to 1 year)	Basic trust versus mistrust
Toddlerhood (1 to 2 years)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Early childhood (3 to 6 years)	Initiative versus guilt
Middle childhood (7 to 12 years)	Industry versus inferiority
Adolescence to emerging adulthood (teens into twenties)	Identity versus role confusion
Early adulthood (twenties to early forties)	Intimacy versus isolation
Middle adulthood (forties to sixties)	Generativity versus stagnation
Late adulthood (late sixties and beyond)	Integrity versus despair

role confusion Erikson's term for a failure in identity formation, marked by the lack of any sense of a future adult path.

labeled **role confusion**. They had no sense of any adult path: "[The person feels as] if he were moving in molasses. It is hard . . . to go to bed and . . . to get up . . ." (quoted in Erikson, 1968, p. 169).

Some people felt a frightening sense of falseness: "If I tell a girl I like her, if I make a gesture . . . this third voice is at me all the time — 'You're doing this for effect; you're a phony'" (p. 173). Others could not cope with having any future and planned to end their lives on a symbolic date.

Role confusion — aimlessly drifting, or shutting down — differs from the active search process Erikson labeled *moratorium* (1980). Taking time to explore different paths, he argued, is crucial to forming a solid adult identity. Having witnessed Hitler's Holocaust, Erikson believed that young people must discover their *own* identities. He had seen a destructive process of identity formation firsthand. To cope with their nation's economic problems after World War I, German teenagers leaped into pathological identities by entering totalitarian organizations such as the Hitler Youth.

Can we categorize the ways people tackle the challenge of constructing an adult identity? Decades ago, James Marcia answered yes.

identity statuses Marcia's four categories of identity formation: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement.

Marcia's Identity Statuses

Marcia (1966, 1987) devised four **identity statuses** to expand on Erikson's powerful ideas:

identity diffusion According to James Marcia, an identity status in which the person is aimless or feels totally blocked, without any adult life path.

identity foreclosure According to James Marcia, an identity status in which the person decides on an adult life path (often one spelled out by an authority figure) without any thought or active search.

moratorium According to James Marcia, an identity status in which the person actively explores different possibilities to find a truly solid adult life path.

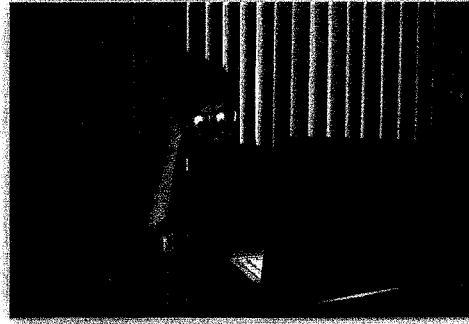
identity achievement A fully mature identity, when a young person decides on a satisfying adult life path.

- **Identity diffusion** best fits Erikson's description of the most troubled teens — young people drifting aimlessly toward adulthood without goals: "I don't know where I am going," "Nothing has any appeal."
- **Identity foreclosure** describes a person who adopts an identity without any self-exploration or thought. At its extreme, foreclosure might apply to a young gang member or a teenager who becomes a terrorist. In general, however, researchers define people as being in foreclosure when they adopt an identity handed down by some authority: "My parents want me to take over the family business, so that's what I will do."
- The person in **moratorium** is engaged in the exciting search for an adult self. While this internal process provokes anxiety, because it involves wrestling with different philosophies and ideas, Marcia (and Erikson) believed it was critical to arriving at the final stage.
- **Identity achievement** is this end point: "I've weighed the options and I want to be a graphic designer, no matter what my family says."



Dark Moon Pictures/Shutterstock

This young woman may fit Marcia's category of *identity diffusion*. She seems listless and depressed.



jumpinzen/Shutterstock

This student, forced by his dad to get a computer science degree, feels incredibly bored. People who follow their parents' career choices without exploring other possibilities are in *identity foreclosure*. (While Erikson and Marcia linked this status to poor mental health—as you will see soon—young people “in foreclosure” can also feel happy about this state.)



Robert Daly/Getty Images

This young woman, who has accepted a company internship, is in *identity moratorium* because she wants to figure out if she likes working in this career. We don't know, however, if she is excitedly exploring her options or unproductively obsessing over her choices.



Tetra Images/Getty Images

This delighted man is in *identity achievement* because he has discovered that his life passion lies in graphic design.

As the photo series shows, Marcia's categories offer a marvelous framework for pinpointing what is going wrong (or right) in a young person's life. Perhaps while reading these descriptions you thought, “My best buddy is in diffusion. Now I understand exactly what the problem is!” How do these statuses play out in life?

The Identity Statuses in Action

Marcia believed that as teenagers get older, they pass from diffusion to moratorium to achievement. Who thinks much about adulthood in ninth or tenth grade? At that age, your agenda is to cope with puberty. You test the limits. You sometimes act in ways tailor-made to undermine your adult life (see Chapter 9). Then older adolescents and emerging adults undertake a moratorium search as adulthood looms in full view. By their late twenties or soon after, people reach achievement, finding a secure adult identity.

Longitudinal research conducted in northern Europe confirms this identity shift. People do progress from moratorium to achievement by their early thirties (Eriksson and others, 2020). But if we scan the *entire* span of adult life, identity statuses often change (Schwartz and others, 2015; Waterman, 1999). A woman

might enter college exploring different faiths, then become a committed Catholic, start questioning her choice at age 40, and finally settle on her spiritual identity in Baha'i. As many older students are aware, you may have believed you were in identity achievement, but shifted back to moratorium when you realized, "I need a more fulfilling, secure job."

This lifelong shift is appropriate. The push to rethink our plans and goals is what makes us human. Moreover, revising our identity is vital to living fully since our lives are always being disrupted — as we change careers, become parents, are widowed, or adapt to our children leaving the nest (McAdams, 2013).

The bad news is that young people may get mired in unproductive identity statuses. In some studies, an alarming 1 in 4 undergraduates is locked in diffusion (Côté & Bynner, 2008). They don't have *any* career goals. Or, people may be sampling different paths, but without much Eriksonian moratorium joy. Is your friend who keeps changing majors excitedly exploring the options, or afraid of entering the real world? Are the emerging adults who shift from low-wage job to low-wage job really in moratorium or randomly drifting into adult life?

Actually, Erikson's and Marcia's assumptions that people need to sample *many* fields to construct a solid career identity is false. Having a career in mind from childhood, such as knowing from age 9 that you want to be a nurse (the status Marcia dismisses as "foreclosure"), can be fine. Anxiously obsessing about possibilities — being locked in a state called **ruminative moratorium** — predicts emotional distress (Bogaerts and others, 2020): "I don't know if I want to be an anesthesiologist or an actor, and that's driving me crazy."

There can even be problems with being identity achieved. Suppose that after searching various possibilities, you adopt a devalued identity ("Yes, I'll enter medical school, but I'm not convinced being a doctor is for me"). It doesn't matter *how* we arrive at achievement. What's crucial is to make a commitment and feel confident that this decision expresses our inner self (see Schwartz and others, 2015, for reviews).

ruminative moratorium When a young person is unable to decide between different identities, becoming emotionally paralyzed and extremely anxious.

Ethnic Identity, a Minority Theme

The emotional advantage of feeling positive about who we are is underscored by **ethnic identity**, a person's sense of belonging to a defined ethnic category, such as Asian American. If you are a member of the dominant culture, you may rarely think about your ethnicity. For young people of color, as I've suggested in earlier chapters, ethnic identity is more salient, although its importance waxes and wanes at different ages. A boy may become acutely aware of his Dominican roots if he attends a mainly White middle school (Douglass, Wang, & Yip, 2016). While

bonding with friends who share her heritage, a girl may feel especially Korean or Vietnamese (Douglass, Mirpuri, & Yip, 2017).

Experiencing discrimination (no surprise) solidifies ethnic identity. And recall from Chapter 9 that these upsetting experiences can propel teenagers of color to succeed ("I'm determined to prove that people like me can make it!"). But discrimination is a double-edged sword if it causes young people to completely reject society's norms. In one study in Germany, while Muslim and Turkish teenagers who reported intense discrimination felt more attached to their ethnic group, they became alienated from the mainstream culture as a whole (Fleischmann, Leszczensky, & Pink, 2019).

Therefore, ethnic pride *can* offer a lifelong sense of mission, if young people use their "roots" in a positive way: To embrace their heritage (and honor the "rare sacrifices" of their families; see Chapter 9) by working to triumph in the *current* world.

ethnic identity How people come to terms with who they are as people in relation to their unique ethnic or racial heritage.



Connecting with their ethnic identity during shared rituals such as this wedding dance in Crete can give young people an intense sense of life meaning.

As Carmen, who was raised by her Colombian grandparents, put it, “I’m determined to graduate from college. My grandmother and my grandfather . . . They were such strong people. My grandmother never went to school, but she encouraged my curiosity. I come from a very poor family. But we have worked hard for what we have today” (quoted in McCallen & Johnson, 2019, p. 8).

Biracial or multiracial emerging adults, people from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds (like Vice President Kamala Harris or former President Barack Obama), have unique struggles. How do I reconcile my different ethnic roots? But here, too, reaching identity achievement has emotional benefits. As one biracial woman put it, “When I was younger, I felt I didn’t belong anywhere. . . . Now I’ve . . . come to the conclusion that my home is inside myself” (quoted in Phinney, 2006, p. 128).

Making sense of our “place in the world” as an ethnic minority is a minority identity theme. But every person grapples with choosing a career and finding love. The rest of this chapter tackles those agendas.

biracial or multiracial identity
How people of mixed racial backgrounds come to terms with who they are as people in relation to their heritage.

Tying It All Together

1. You overhear your psychology professor saying that his daughter Emma shows symptoms of Erikson’s role confusion. Emma must be _____ (*drifting/actively searching for an identity*), which in Marcia’s identity status framework is a sign of _____ (*diffusion/foreclosure/moratorium*).
2. Yohance said, “I’ve wanted to be a lawyer since I was a little boy.” Tayen replied, “I don’t know what my career will be, and I’ve been obsessing over the possibilities day and night.” Yohance’s identity status is _____ (*moratorium/foreclosure/diffusion/achievement*), whereas Tayen’s status is _____ (*moratorium/foreclosure/diffusion/achievement*). According to the research, who is most apt to have an emotional problem?
3. Xavier has enrolled in nursing school. To predict his happiness, pick the right question to ask: *Have you explored different career possibilities?* / *Do you feel a nursing career expresses your inner self?*
4. Having a strong ethnic identity is *always positive/always negative/could be positive or negative, depending on whether a young person engages productively in society*.

Answers to the Tying It All Together questions can be found at the end of this chapter.

Finding a Career

When asked to sum up the definition of ideal mental health, Sigmund Freud famously answered, “The ability to love and work.” Let’s now look at finding ourselves in the world of work.

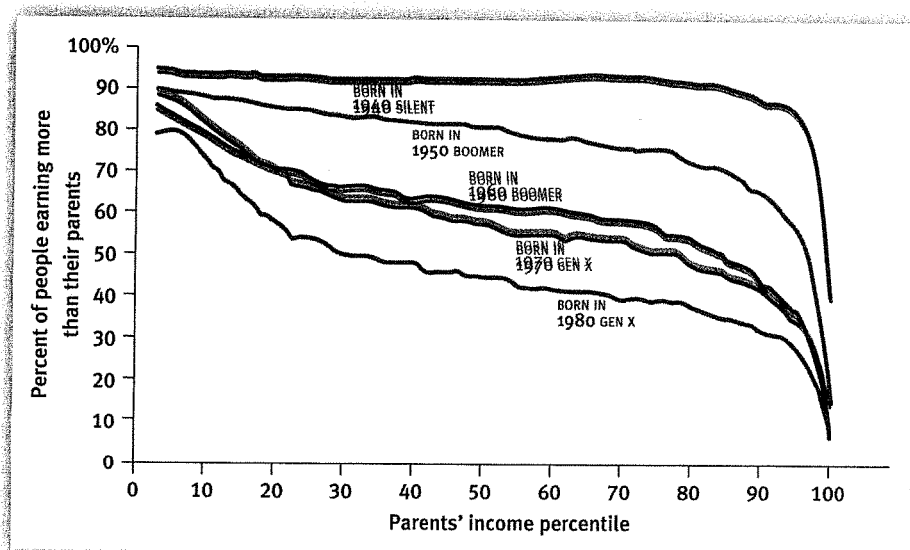
When did you begin thinking about your career? What influences are drawing you to psychology, nursing, or business — a compelling class, a caring mentor, or the conviction that this field would fit your talents best? How do young people feel about their careers, their futures, and working itself?

To answer these questions, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider (2000) conducted a pioneering study of teenagers’ career dreams. They selected 33 U.S. schools and interviewed students from sixth to twelfth grade. To chart how young people felt — when at home, with friends, when at school — they used the *experience-sampling method* (discussed in Chapter 9). Now let’s touch on their insights and recent studies as we track young people moving through their emerging adult years.

Learning Outcomes

- Describe self-esteem changes after young people enter college and emerging adult emotional growth.
- Outline the features and function of flow states.
- Explore higher education, making special reference to issues relating to completing college and the school-to-work transition.
- Summarize strategies for having a fulfilling college experience.

Figure 10.3: The fading chances of earning more than one's parents at age 30 Basic to the “American dream” is having children who are more successful in income (and, of course, education). But, while upward mobility was the birthright of American babies born during World War II (early 1940s), notice how, in each subsequent cohort, these odds steadily decreased, especially if your parents were middle class. Data from Chetty and others, 2016



Entering with High (But Often Unrealistic) Career Goals

Almost every teenager dreams of going to college and having a high-paying career. This tendency to aim high appears regardless of gender or social class (Silva, 2016). Whether male or female, rich or poor, adolescents have lofty career goals. But, as you can see in Figure 10.3, recent cohorts of emerging adults face a far more difficult economy than their parents and grandparents confronted at the same age. Therefore, it makes sense that, in one pre-pandemic poll, college freshmen reported being more driven to work hard than their counterparts in the past (Pryor and others, 2011).

The problem is that teenagers are (naturally) clueless about the objective barriers to reaching their dream careers. Can someone who “hates reading” spend a decade getting a psychology Ph.D.? What happens when my students learn they must earn a GPA close to 3.7 to enter my university’s nursing program, or that they can’t go to law school because of the astronomical costs? Career disappointment can lurk around the corner for young people as they enter college and confront the real world. How do they react?

Self-Esteem and Emotional Growth During College and Beyond

One U.S. survey showed that self-esteem dips dramatically during the first semester of college (Chung and others, 2014) and gradually rises over the next few years (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 2013). Because entering students inflate their academic abilities, it can be a shock to encounter demanding college work. Listen to Adriana, a first-generation Mexican American psychology major, reflect on her feelings after enrolling in a challenging college science class:

I was a little full of myself . . . and I thought, “Oh it can’t be that hard,” and I would memorize it (the terms), but . . . at . . . the test . . . I would just blank out. . . . It became easier ‘cause I became friends with someone . . . in my classes. . . . We helped each other study, and yeah, I ended up getting a B in the microbio lecture and lab.

(quoted in McCallen & Johnson, 2019, p. 8)

Can we predict which freshmen, like Adriana, resiliently take control? As you might imagine, young people who thrive during high school are set up to flourish when confronting the demands of college life. In their study, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) called these efficacious teens “workers.” They are the 16-year-olds who amaze you with their ability to balance band, a part-time job, and honors classes.

But even when teenagers never qualified as “workers,” emerging adulthood can be a time of tremendous emotional growth (Alessandri and others, 2016; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2015). Growth is most likely to occur in a personality dimension that psychologists call *conscientiousness* — becoming more reliable, and developing self-control (Walton and others, 2013; more about this topic in Chapter 12).

To explain this rise in *executive functions*, neuroscientists look to the fully developed frontal lobes. But an equally plausible cause lies in the wider world. Finding a job that perfectly fits your talents (see the Experiencing the Lifespan box) can transform even troubled teens into adult workers (Dennissen, Asendorpf, & van Aken, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi argues that a powerful inner state can lock *anyone* into the right career.

Experiencing the Lifespan A Surprising Path to Adult Success

Dyslexia caused him serious trouble in elementary school; then, at age 12, he began taking drugs. When, at 15, he took the family car and ran away for a weekend in New Orleans, his frantic father visited the local jail and begged the police to take his son in. Finally, his hysterical parents paid guards to take him to a wilderness program and then sent him to a school for troubled teens, where he spent his high school years. After dropping out of college his first semester, during his twenties he drifted from job to job. He had incredible social talents, but couldn't get along with his bosses.

At about age 30, he got into real estate—a profession for which you don't need a college degree, where what

matters is hard work and world-class people skills. After taking the sales associate test eight times, he finally passed! Today, at age 37, he owns a management company and gets national performance awards. He is on track to out-earn his parents (who both graduated from Ivy League schools). His name is Thomas Belsky, and he is my son.

Am I sharing this story *just* to brag about my son and show that, with incredible self-efficacy, children can triumph against academic odds? I'll answer no. Suppose Thomas had grown up with adults who weren't devoted to his well-being, or lived in a society where it was impossible to construct a secure adult life. Would he have fulfilled his natural gifts, or even be alive today?

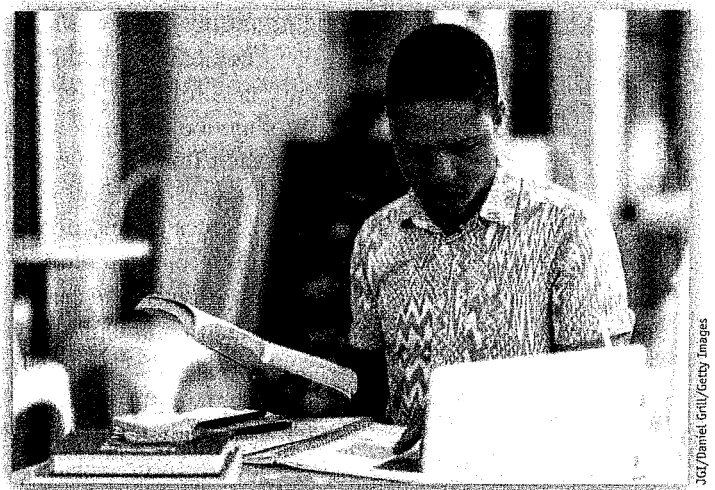
Finding Flow

Think back over the past week to the times you felt energized and alive. You might be surprised to discover that events you looked forward to — such as relaxing at home — do not come to mind. Many of life's most uplifting experiences occur when we connect deeply with people. Others take place when we are immersed in some compelling task. Csikszentmihalyi calls this intense task absorption **flow**.

Flow is different from “feeling happy.” We enter this state during an activity that stretches our capacities, such as the challenge of decoding a difficult academic problem, or (hopefully) mastering the material in this class. People differ in the activities that cause flow. For some of us, it's hiking in the Himalayas that produces this feeling. For me, it has been writing this book. When we are in flow, we enter an altered state of consciousness when we forget the outside world. Problems disappear. We lose all sense of time. The activity feels infinitely worth doing for its own sake. Flow makes us feel completely alive.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who spent his career studying flow, finds that some people rarely experience this feeling. Others feel flow several times a day. If you

flow Csikszentmihalyi's term for feeling total absorption in a challenging, goal-oriented activity.



For this captivated graduate student, the hours may fly by. Challenging activities that draw on our talents and skills produce that marvelous inner state called flow.

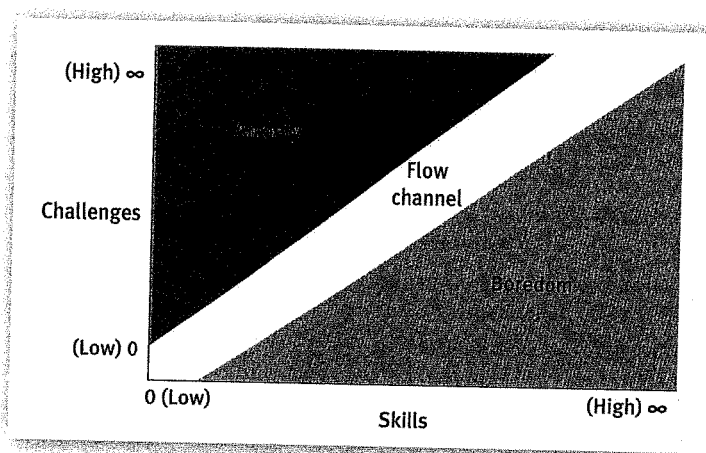


Figure 10.4: The zone of flow Notice that the flow zone (white area) depends on a delicate matching of our abilities and the challenge involved in a particular real-world task. If the task is beyond our capacities, we land in the upper red area of the chart and become anxious. If the task is too easy, we land in the lower, gray area of the chart and become bored. Moreover, as our skills increase, the task difficulty must also rise to provide us with the sense of being in flow. Which theorist's ideas about teaching and what stimulates mental growth does this model remind you of? (See the bottom of the page for the answer.)

Data from Csikszentmihalyi, 1990

feel flow only during a rare mountain-climbing experience or, worse yet, when robbing a bank, Csikszentmihalyi argues that it will be difficult to construct a satisfying life. The challenge is to find flow in ways related to a career.

Flow depends on being *intrinsically motivated*. We must be mesmerized by what we are doing right now for its own sake, not for an extrinsic reward. But there is a future-oriented dimension to feeling flow. Flow happens when we are working toward a goal.

For example, the idea that this book will be published a year from now is pushing me to write this page. But what riveted me to my chair this morning is the process of writing. Getting into a flow state is often elusive. On the days when I can't construct a paragraph, I get anxious. But if I could not regularly find flow in my writing, I would never be writing this book.

Figure 10.4 shows exactly why finding flow can be difficult. That state depends on a delicate *person–environment fit*. When a task seems beyond our capacities, we become anxious. When an activity is too simple, we grow bored. Ideally, the activities that make us feel flow can alert us to our ideal careers. Think about some situation in which you recently felt in flow. If you are in ruminative moratorium or worry you may be in career diffusion, can you use this feeling to alert you to a particular field?

Drawing on flow and my discussion of identity, as well as economic concerns, let's now look at two career paths that emerging adults in the United States follow.

Emerging into Adulthood Without a College Degree (in the United States)

"I never want this kind of job for my kids." This comment, from a 40-year-old high school graduate construction worker, sums up the general feeling in the United States that college is vital for having a good life (Arnett, 2016; Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2019). Actually, more than 2 of every 3 U.S. high school graduates enroll in college right after high school. However, as time passes, the ranks thin. For students beginning at four-year institutions, the odds of graduating within the next six years are about 3 in 5 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). The graduation rates for their community-college counterparts are lower than this.

People in the United States who don't go to college or who never get their degree can have fulfilling careers. Some, like my son, excel at Robert Sternberg's practical intelligence (described in Chapter 7) but do not do well academically. When they find their flow in the work world, they blossom.

However, I wouldn't rely on anecdotal reports. As of 2019, people with bachelor's degrees earned on average \$32,000 more annually than their counterparts with only high school diplomas (Association of Public Land-Grant Universities, 2020; see Figure 10.5a). The pandemic exacerbated these inequalities, making it especially difficult for non-college graduates to find jobs. In fact, as that now familiar term "essential worker" (typically meaning low-wage) shows, having a college degree makes people far more likely to work remotely, without enduring the health hazards and hassles of physically going to a job.

Given these facts, why do many emerging adults drop out of school? Our first assumption is that these people are not "college material" — uninterested in academics, poorly prepared in high school, and/or unable to do the work.

True, to succeed in college, academic aptitude is important (Ishitani, 2016). Only teens with a 3.0 high school GPA or higher have more than 50/50 odds of finishing a four-year degree (University of Chicago, 2021). But, as Figure 10.5b shows, economic

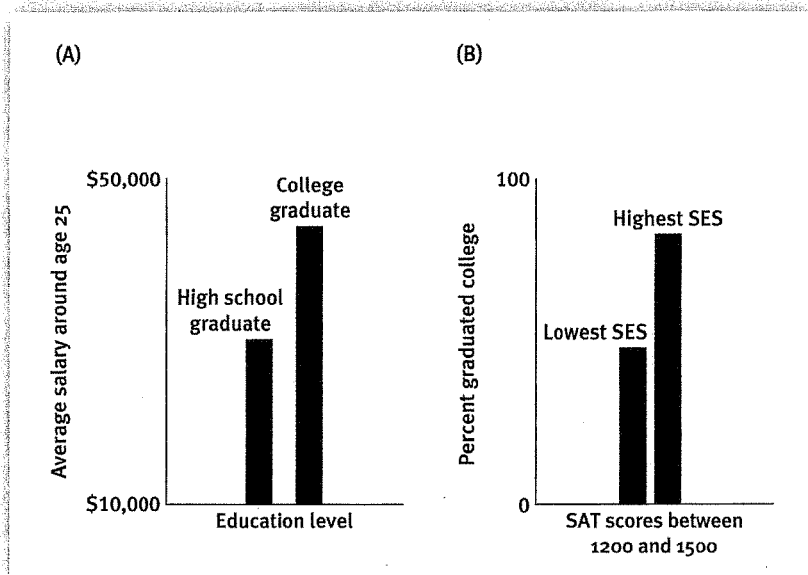


Figure 10.5: Snapshots of economic inequality, with regard to higher education, earnings, and getting a college degree Chart (A) shows that, for recent graduates, the high school versus higher-education earnings gap is wide, which underscores the fact that people without a college degree are “left behind” economically. Chart (B) shows that for intellectually talented young people, family income makes a huge difference in getting that degree. Bottom line: In the United States, finishing college is vital, and low-income, high-ability students are at a severe disadvantage.

(A) Data from Association of Public Land-Grant Universities, 2020; (B) Data from Carnevale & Strohl, 2010

considerations matter greatly. Academically talented, low-SES young people are far less likely to graduate from college than their affluent peers (Silva, 2016).

When the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation surveyed more than 600 young adults ages 22 to 30 who had dropped out of college, they discovered the same message — money matters. Only 1 in 10 students said they left school because the courses were too difficult or they weren’t interested in the work. The main reason was that they had to work full time to finance school, and the strain became too much (Silva, 2016).

The silver lining is that most of these people did plan to return. And, as many nontraditional student readers are aware, there are emotional advantages to leaving and then coming back. In Sweden and Australia, the social clock for college is programmed to start ticking a few years after high school (Arnett, 2007; Curtis, Mlotkowski, & Lumsden, 2012). The reasoning is that time spent in the wider world helps people home in on what to study in school.

Smoothing the School Path and School-to-Work Transition

Still, we can’t let society off the hook. The fact that financing college is so difficult for U.S. young people is a national shame (Arnett, 2016). The standard practice of taking out loans means that college graduates face frightening economic futures after earning their degrees (Gibson-Davis & Percheski, 2018). In the class of 2019, on average, students graduated owing the government and private lenders almost \$30,000 (Student Loan Hero, 2020).

What can colleges do? To undercut identity moratorium (and the more than four years until graduation statistic I cited earlier), schools now offer programs designed to get entering students on track academically by selecting majors during their freshman year.



Triumphing over Hitler's Germany provided a lifelong maturity boost for a whole cohort of 18-year-old boys and girls—and because, during World War II, serving one's nation in the military was mandatory, these young soldiers were apt to develop strong lifelong bonds from sharing this pivotal *unifying* experience that transcended religion, ethnic background, and social class.

school-to-work transition The change from the schooling phase of life to the work world.

Another possibility is to require young people to perform a gap year of challenging national service at age 18. Realizing that, just as with puberty rituals (described in Chapter 8), separating from parents propels maturity, nations from Israel to Switzerland and from Singapore to South Korea require some form of military or civilian youth service after high school. At a minimum, getting U.S. young people to work side-by-side with peers of every race, political orientation, and social class can help break the tribal, often class-based bubbles that are tearing the United States apart.

We also should rethink our emphasis on college as the only ticket to a financially secure, successful life. Because some people are skilled at working with their hands, or excel in *practical intelligence*, why force non-academically oriented emerging adults to endure a poor talent–environment fit? Can't we develop

government-sponsored apprentice programs like the ones currently in operation in Germany? In that nation, employers partner with schools that offer on-the-job training. Graduates emerge with a *definite* position in a specific firm (see Buchanan, 2017).

How many young people are locked in diffusion or moratorium because the United States lacks a defined **school-to-work transition** (school-to-career path)? Rather than leaving the anxiety-ridden, post-education job-hunt to luck and putting the burden on the “inner” talents of kids, can't we devise strategies to help young people confront this crucial social-clock challenge of adult life?

Table 10.3 summarizes the main messages of this section by offering suggestions for emerging adults and society. Now it's time to immerse ourselves in the undergraduate experience.

Table 10.3: Succeeding in College/Finding a Career Identity: Tips for Young People and Society

For Young People

1. Understand that when you enter college, you may overestimate your academic abilities. It takes time to get adjusted to the demands of this new life!
2. Focus on finding your flow in selecting a career. Avoid obsessing over different possibilities, but understand that it can take time to formulate a clear career plan.
3. If you need to drop out, understand it's not the end of the world. Having a year or two off may help you home in on a career identity and be a better student.

For Colleges and Society

1. Provide support to help students succeed.
2. Reach out to low-income students and offer special services for parents or working adults.
3. Institute a national (ideally, mandatory) gap year of government service for all young people at age 18 and offer apprenticeship programs linked to jobs—ones that offer a conduit to careers without college.
4. Make negotiating young people's school-to-work transition a national priority!

Being in College

So far, I've been implying that the only purpose of college is to find a career. Thankfully, in surveys, most U.S. college graduates disagree. They report that the main value of being an undergraduate was to help them “grow intellectually and personally” (Hoover, 2011).

If you are a traditional college student, here are tips to make your college experience an inner-growth flow zone.

Making College an Inner-Growth Flow Zone

Get the Best Professors (and Contact Them Outside of Class!) It's a no-brainer that, just as in elementary school (see Chapter 7), feeling supported by a talented professor propels identity achievement (Schenkenfelder, Frickey, & Larson, 2020). Listen to Sangeeta, a first-generation sociology major from Afghanistan:

I think my first professor . . . had an impact on making me see sociology in a different way. . . . He wanted to hear what the students had to say . . . as if you were in a conversation with him. . . . I even kept the book, which is something I do not do.

And Elina, from Mexico, who decided to major in math, commented:

One of my math professors — I liked the way he would interact with everyone like he was a friend. . . . His office hours weren't restricted. . . . I felt myself participating a lot in that class and he . . . would praise my effort. . . . He also would offer help.

(quoted in McCallen & Johnson, 2019, p. 7)

Connect Your Classes to Potential Careers Professors' missions are to excite you about their field. But classes can't provide the hands-on experience you need to find your zone of flow. So institute your personal school-to-work transition. Set up independent studies involving volunteer work. If you are interested in science, work in a professor's lab. If your passion is politics, do an internship with a local legislator. In one study, college seniors mentioned that the highlight of their undergraduate experience occurred during a mentored project in the real world (Light, 2001).

Immerse Yourself in the College Milieu Following this advice may seem challenging if you are taking classes online. Still, even if you never get to campus, you have ample chances to connect with your peers and teachers via Zoom. Browse the many activities your college offers. Join a campus organization — or two or three. Writing for the college newspaper or becoming active in the drama club will not only provide you with a rich source of friends, it can help promote your career identity, too.

Capitalize on the Diverse Human Connections College Offers As I've been highlighting, peer groups are vital in shaping development from preschool on. At college, it is tempting to find a single clique and not reach out to other crowds. Resist this impulse. A major growth experience college provides is the chance to relate to people of different points of view (Hu & Kuh, 2003; Rockenbach and others, 2018). Here's what a Harvard undergraduate had to say:

I have re-evaluated my beliefs. . . . At college, there are people of all different religions around me. . . . Living . . . with these people . . . has made me reconsider and ultimately reaffirm my faith.

(quoted in Light, 2001, p. 163)

But this community college student summed it up best:

When I . . . have all these great stories . . . they think college is . . . amazing . . . because of all the people I'm surrounded with.

(quoted in Schreiner and others, 2011, p. 337)

Being surrounded by interesting people has another benefit: It promotes Erikson's other emerging adult task — finding love.

Developmental Psychology Videos

College Binge Drinking

In this video, you will explore the dark side of the college community—the pressure to binge drink.  Achieve

Tying It All Together

1. Your 17-year-old cousin is graduating from high school. Given what you learned in this section, you might predict that she has *overly high/overly low* expectations about her academic abilities and that she will *become more mature/remain exactly the same* as she travels through her twenties.
2. Ileara loves her server job. When the restaurant is hectic, time flies by. She feels like a multitasking whiz! Ileara is describing a(n) _____ experience.
3. Josiah says the reason his classmates drop out of college is that they can't do the work. Jocasta says, "No, it's the need to work incredible hours to pay for school." Make each person's case, using the information from this chapter.
4. Your nephew Juan, a new freshman, asks for tips about how to succeed in college. Based on this section, pick the advice you should *not* give:
 - a. Get involved in campus activities.
 - b. Select friends who have exactly the same ideas as you do.
 - c. Get the best professors and reach out to make connections with them.

Answers to the Tying It All Together questions can be found at the end of this chapter.

Learning Outcomes

- Outline changes in the twenty-first-century search for love.
- Explain Murstein's theory, making reference to critiques of homogamy and the idea that mate selection progresses in defined stages.
- Survey adult attachment theory.
- Summarize this section's tips for finding fulfilling relationships.
- Explore how social media affects the passage to adulthood.

Finding Love

How do emerging adults negotiate Erikson's first task of adult life — **intimacy**, the search for love (see Table 10.4)? Let's first explore some cultural shifts in the ways we choose mates before turning to our main topic: finding fulfilling love.

Setting the Context: Seismic Shifts in Searching for Love

Daolin Yang lives in Hebei Province, China. . . . At age 15, he married his wife Yufen, then 13. . . . A matchmaker proposed the marriage on behalf of the Yang family. They have been married for 62 years. . . . He says that they married first and dated later. It is "cold at the start and hot in the end." The relationship gets better and better over the years.

(quoted in Xia & Zhou, 2003, p. 231)

I carefully chose Christian Mingle to find the girl of my dreams. And because Cora and I share so many values, we have been happily married for the past five years.

intimacy Erikson's first adult task, which involves connecting with a partner in a mutual loving relationship.

Table 10.4: Erikson's Psychosocial Stages (Early Adulthood)

Life Stage	Primary Task
Infancy (birth to 1 year)	Basic trust versus mistrust
Toddlerhood (1 to 2 years)	Autonomy versus shame and doubt
Early childhood (3 to 6 years)	Initiative versus guilt
Middle childhood (7 to 12 years)	Industry versus inferiority
Adolescence to emerging adulthood (teens into twenties)	Identity versus role confusion
Early adulthood (twenties to early forties)	Intimacy versus isolation
Middle adulthood (forties to sixties)	Generativity versus stagnation
Late adulthood (late sixties and beyond)	Integrity versus despair

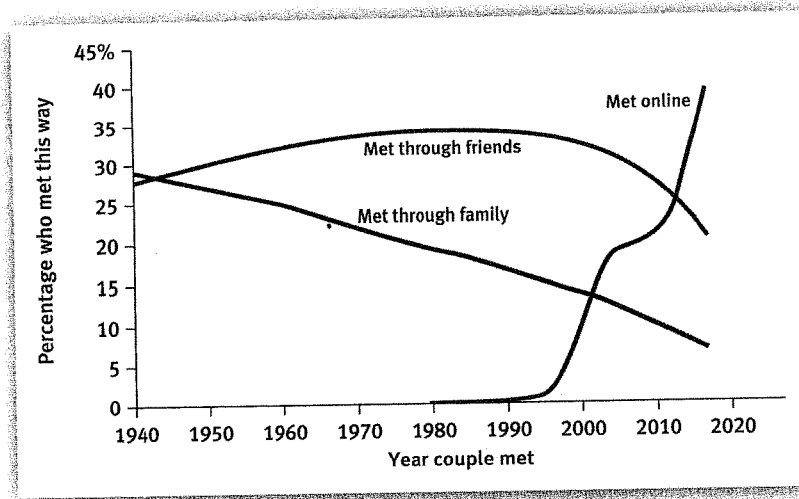


Figure 10.6: Percent of U.S. heterosexual couples meeting their partner through parents, through friends, and via social media or dating apps over the past 80 years This chart shows how dating apps and social media upended our search for love within just two decades. In fact, six years ago, after deciding to move alone to a new city (Chicago) after my husband died, I met my current partner online. Now, I wonder, would I have *even* been willing to make this difficult move if the Internet hadn't offered me this built-in opportunity to find later-life love?

Data from Rosenfeld, Thomas, & Hausen, 2019

Throughout history, parents chose a child's marital partner (often during puberty), and newlyweds hoped (if they were lucky) to later fall in love. Then, from World War II to roughly the second decade of the twenty-first century, young people often found their mates through family and friends. Now, as you can see in Figure 10.6, the search for love has firmly relocated to the virtual world. Moreover, studies suggest that people who marry mates they met online are more likely to be happy with their spouses than their counterparts who met in the traditional ways! (See Cacioppo and others, 2013.)

Many More Partner Choices—with Cautions

The twentieth-century lifestyle revolution also produced a remarkable expansion in the *kind* of partners we choose. As late as the 1950s in the South, interracial marriages were against the law. Fast forward 75 years, and U.S. census data show that one 1 in 10 couples married someone of a different ethnicity or race (Rico, Kreider, & Anderson, 2018)!

However, there are limits to the assumption that we live in a golden age of diverse partner choices. Yes, during the 1950s, young people risked being shunned by their parents (and society) for marrying outside of their race. But in that era of upward mobility, Americans were far more likely to choose partners of a different social class than today. Escalating income inequalities mean that twenty-first-century U.S. citizens are increasingly likely to be raised in class-based social milieus. Therefore, mate choices today are as stratified by income as during the early twentieth century (Gibson-Davis & Percheski, 2018)!

Still, one *total* transformation has occurred in the way we select mates: Gender and sexual freedom are clearly out of the closet in the Western world.

Trending in Developmental Science: Same-Sex Romance

In the 1990s, when I began teaching, I vividly remember my students' uneasiness when I mentioned **sexual orientation**—our sexual and romantic attractions. No more! Although the gay rights movement exploded in the late 1960s in New York City, its most amazing strides took place during the early twenty-first century. As one developmentalist put it, within a few years, the announcement "I'm gay" went from evoking shock to producing yawns—"So, what else is new?" (See Savin-Williams, 2001, 2008.) In an age in which emerging adults define themselves as "mostly straight," "sometimes gay," "occasionally bisexual," and now "nonbinary," limiting sexual orientation to a defined category has become passe.

sexual orientation Our sexual and romantic attractions to particular genders.

Table 10.5: Stereotypes and Scientific Realities Related to Being Transgender and Gay

Stereotype #1: Transgender people change their bodies to conform to their inner gender identity, and then select same-sex romantic partners.

Answer: *False.* Transgender teens and adults may decide to forgo sex reassignment therapy. While hormonal and surgical interventions can be emotionally lifesaving, physically transitioning is not essential to having a fulfilling life. Moreover, because gender identity is unrelated to sexual orientation, a transgender man or woman may identify as gay (be attracted to same-sex partners only), heterosexual, bisexual, or asexual.

Stereotype #2: Overinvolved or distant parents cause children to be gay or transgender.

Answer: *This statement is also false.* Although a definite genetic/brain/biological cause has yet to be found, early-life testosterone levels help to program later sexual orientation and gender identity (see Chapter 5). In one compelling interview study, transgender participants reported that their parents had raised them in the exact same way as their siblings.

Stereotype #3: Gay and transgender couples have lower-quality relationships and pathological family interactions.

Answer: *False, yet again.* Same-sex and transgender romantic bonds vary in quality just like heterosexual and cisgender relationships do. In fact, some research suggests that lesbian couples fight less and have superior child-rearing skills—hitting their children less frequently and engaging in more caring, mind-minded pretend play.

Stereotype #4: Gay and transgender teens and emerging adults have high rates of mental health issues.

Answer: *Unfortunately, this statement is accurate,* with psychological problems such as depression and drug abuse common among sexual-minority youth. In one nationwide poll, 40 percent of gay teens had attempted suicide. One cause is the frequent bullying these young people experience beginning in childhood (see Chapter 6). Still, the massive social rejection that transgender and gay youth confronted in the past is less intense today in the West.

Information from Diamond, 2013; Harper & Wilson, 2017; Meuwly and others, 2013; National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016; Schrimmer, Retseker, & Ohnishi, 2016.

homophobia Intense fear and dislike of people who are LGBTQ+.

transgender People whose gender identity is different from their sex at birth. Transgender teens and adults may be attracted to same- or other-sex partners; they may or may not undergo medical treatments to make their bodies congruent with their gender identity.

Homophobia, fear and dislike of LGBTQ+ people, still is not rare. The fact that, as early as elementary school (see Chapter 6), peers reject boys who don't stick to standard gender roles suggests that even now mainstream society has serious qualms about accepting people who venture outside of heterosexual norms. **Transgender** teens and emerging adults, young people whose gender identity is different from their sex at birth, face special challenges as they struggle to be accepted in the twenty-first-century world.

Given this enduring social scorn, it makes sense that, as I mentioned in Chapter 8, LGBTQ+ young people undergo considerable emotional turmoil during their early teens. (See Table 10.5 for more about this issue and other scientific facts about sexual-minority youth and adults.) Because ethnic-minority families are more apt to adhere to traditional gender conceptions, Black and Latino LGBTQ+ young people frequently have special difficulty deciding when and how to come out to their parents (Budge and others, 2016; Richter, Lindahl, & Malik, 2017).

Today, social media gives sexual-minority children reaching puberty a safe space to practice these difficult conversations. They can get caring support from youth worldwide to confront the scary challenge of disclosing their sexual orientation to loved ones (Bates and others, 2020).

And so, in one U.S. survey of 165 bisexual and gay young people, the largest group (about 4 in 5 adolescents and emerging adults) was classified as identity achieved. These young people said they felt accepted by their families and comfortable with their sexual orientation. The concern was the 1 in 5 respondents the researchers labeled as “struggling.” While these young people “knew” their identity, they worried about disclosing this fact to parents and friends (Bregman and others, 2013).

The most at-risk group may be young people who are forced to live a life incompatible with their desires. When researchers explored the mental health of women who defined themselves as heterosexual but reported mainly same-sex attractions, this group was likely to be more distressed than their counterparts who openly labeled themselves as bisexual or gay (Johns, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2013). ■

Again, this research underscores the importance of being identity achieved in a positive way. Once you *embrace* your identity (or self) — whether gay, transgender, nonbinary, or as an ethnic minority — there is a sense of self-efficacy and relief. But problems arise if your society or attachment figures dislike the person you “really” are (Velkoff and others, 2016), or when you languish untethered in moratorium for an extended time.

A More Erratic, Extended Dating Phase

Unfortunately, however, romantic moratorium is built into Western society because, as I’ve been highlighting, the untethered phase of mate selection lasts so long. In tracking over 500 economically diverse young people from age 18 to 25, U.S. researchers found that a fraction — about 1 in 4 respondents — did find an enduring, stable relationship soon after leaving their teens. The largest group — almost 1 in 3 people — had only sporadic relationships or no romantic involvements during their college careers (Rauer and others, 2013).

When emerging adults do find a partner, they may have on-again/off-again relationships, a process called **relationship churning** (see Cherlin, 2020). In one U.S. survey, nearly 1 in 2 couples in their twenties who broke up got back together again at some point. And, after ending the relationship, half continued to have sex with their ex (Halpern-Meekin and others, 2013).

In interviews, young people gamely frame their romantic disappointments as learning experiences: “Don’t trust someone because they say they love you. Sometimes it’s better to let things go” (quoted in Norona, Roberson, & Welsh, 2017, p. 168). But it’s no surprise that, after these breakups, people are more likely to binge-drink (Bowers, Segrin, & Joyce, 2016). Their mental health may decline (Barr and others, 2016). One longitudinal study suggested that, after a couple separates, the losses in self-esteem tend to last a full year (Luciano & Orth, 2017). Contrast this with the research suggesting that cohabiting and getting married increases young people’s feelings of self-worth (Mernitz & Dush, 2016)!

I believe that these studies validate Erikson’s idea that finding intimacy is important during emerging adulthood. While it may make good sense to be wary about marriage, a high-quality love relationship can buffer young people from the ups and downs of the turbulent twenties (and of any age). How can people achieve this goal?

Similarity and Structured Relationship Stages: A Classic Model of Love and a Critique

Bernard Murstein’s now-classic **stimulus-value-role theory** (1999) views finding satisfying love as a three-phase process. During the **stimulus phase**, we see a potential partner and make our first decision: “Could this be a good choice for me?” Since we know nothing about the person, our judgment is based on superficial signs, such as looks or the way the person dresses. In this assessment, we compare our own reinforcement value to the other person’s along a number of dimensions (Murstein, 1999): “True, I am not as attractive, but she may want me because I am better educated.” If the person seems of equal value, we decide to go on a date.

When we start seeing each other, we enter the **value-comparison phase**. Here, our goal is to match up in attitudes: “Does this person share my interests and values?” If this potential partner seems “right,” we enter the **role phase**, in which we work out our shared lives.

So, at a party, Aaron scans the room and rejects Raquel, who has tattoos. If he is swiping on Tinder, he might be put off by Georgette, who looks too gorgeous or shares photos of vacations on her family yacht. Aaron gravitates to Ashanti because her profile suggests that she is more low maintenance and maybe — like him — a bit shy.



This once standard campus scene is less typical today, as undergraduates are putting off romance until they have their careers in place. But, as I suggest in the text, traveling through college (and the twenties) without a stable relationship has emotional downsides.

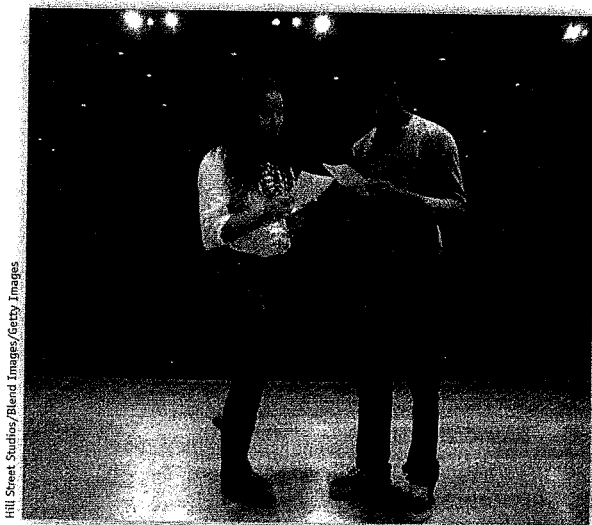
relationship churning On-again/off-again romantic relationships in which couples repeatedly get together and then break up.

stimulus-value-role theory Murstein’s mate-selection theory that suggests similar people pair up and that our path to commitment progresses through three phases (called the *stimulus*, *value-comparison*, and *role* phases).

stimulus phase In Murstein’s theory, the initial mate-selection stage, in which we make judgments about a potential partner based on external characteristics such as appearance.

value-comparison phase In Murstein’s theory, the second mate-selection stage, in which we make judgments about a partner based on similar values and interests.

role phase In Murstein’s theory, the final mate-selection stage, in which committed partners work out their future life together.



Hill Street Studios/Blend Images/Getty Images

Admiring each other's talents in their shared life passion predicts future happiness for this young couple. It also may make these actors feel as if they are becoming better performers just from being together—and it certainly helps if they inflate each other's talents, too ("My partner is sure to be the next Broadway star!").

homogamy The principle that we select a mate who is similar to us.

When Aaron and Ashanti begin seeing each other, they discover that they enjoy the same activities; they both love hiking; they have the same worldview. On their third or tenth date, there may be a revelation that "this person is too different." But, if things go smoothly, Aaron and Ashanti plan their future. Should they cohabit in Colorado, or move to California when they graduate from school? When will they marry and have kids?

The *equal-reinforcement-value partner* aspect of Murstein's theory explains why we expect couples to be similar in "social value" as well as social class (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016). When we find serious value mismatches, we search for reasons to explain these discrepancies (Murstein, Reif, & Syracuse-Siewert, 2002): "That attractive young lawyer must have low self-esteem to have settled for such an unappealing spouse"; "Perhaps he chose that girl because she has millions in the bank."

Most important, Murstein's theory suggests that in love relationships, as in childhood friendships, **homogamy** (similarity) is the driving force. We want a soul mate, a person who matches us, not just in external status, but also in interests and attitudes about life.

Homogamy is enhanced by the fact that people with identical passions gravitate to similar zones of flow. Political junkies discover the love of their life when working on election campaigns. Theater majors find the perfect mate when trying out for plays. Moreover, when couples connect through mutual interests ("I met my love at that audition"), they find an interesting side benefit: Sharing flow activities helps to keep passion alive (Reissman, Aron, & Bergin, 1993).

The Limits to Looking for a Similar Mate

Still, there are important exceptions to the rule that homogamy drives love. In examining happiness among long-married couples, researchers discovered that relationships worked best when one partner was more dominant and the other more submissive (Markey & Markey, 2007).

Logically, matching up two strong personalities might not promote romantic bliss (people would probably fight). Two passive partners might frustrate each other ("Why doesn't my lover take the lead?"). Yes, similarity is important (birds of a feather flock together). But, as in the other familiar saying that opposites attract, couples get along best when they have a *few* select opposing personality preferences and styles.

Moreover, suppose a couple is very similar, but in unpleasant traits, such as their tendency to fly off the handle or be pathologically shy. What really matters in happiness is not so much objective similarity, but believing that a significant other has terrific personality traits. People who see their partner as outgoing and emotionally stable ("He is a real people person, and open to new things") have better relationships over time (Furler, Gomez, & Grob, 2014).

The bottom-line message is that finding a soul mate does not mean selecting a clone. We don't want a reflection of our current self. We choose people who embody our "ideal self"—the person we would like to be. Moreover, one study showed that when people believe their partner embodies their best self ("I fell in love with him because he's a wonderful actor, and that's always been my goal"), they tend to grow emotionally, becoming more like their ideal (Rusbult and others, 2009).

Actually, rather than objectively matching up, happy couples see their mates through rose-colored glasses (Murray & Holmes, 1997). They inflate their partner's virtues (Murray and others, 2000). They overestimate the extent to which they and that person are alike in values and goals (Murray and others, 2002). So science confirms George Bernard Shaw's classic observation: "Love is a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everyone else."

The Limits to Charting Love in Stages

As soon as I met Diego, I was captivated — he was so much more interesting and intelligent than anyone I'd ever known. We started messaging, and one thing led to another the next time we met in person. . . . I wanted to move the relationship forward, but he was getting over a bad breakup. When he finally decided that I, too, was “the one,” it was like the emotional floodgates opened . . . and it's been magic ever since.

This evocative first-person example shared by my talented emerging adult editor shows that viewing mate selection in static stages minimizes the magical essence of love. Couples may suddenly fall in love when they meet after months of messaging. Or there may be an epiphany, when people simply decide, “This is the one.”

In a classic study, researchers captured these ups and downs by asking dating couples to graph their chances (from 0 to 100 percent) of marrying their partner. They then had these student volunteers return each month, chart changes in their feelings of commitment, and explain the reasons for any dramatic relationship turning points (Surra & Hughes, 1997; Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999).

You can see examples of these turning points in Table 10.6. Notice that relationships do often hinge on homogamy issues (“This person is right for me”). Other causes are important, too — from the input of family and friends (“I really dislike that person”) to the idea that “I’m too young to get involved.”

How do emerging adults define the components comprising committed romance? According to one poll, it's important to be faithful and honest with each other, and to work together as a loving team (Konstam, 2019). You also need a partner who can reach out in love.

What does it mean to reach out in love? The answer brings me to the final piece of the puzzle relating to finding fulfilling love: Select someone who is securely attached!

Love Through the Lens of Attachment Theory

In Chapter 4, I discussed the different infant attachment styles. Mary Ainsworth (1973) found that *securely attached* babies run to their mother with hugs and kisses when she appears in the room. *Avoidant* infants act cold, aloof, and indifferent in the Strange Situation when the caregiver returns. *Anxious-ambivalent* babies are overly clingy, afraid to explore the toys, and angry and inconsolable when their caregiver arrives. Now, think of your own romantic relationships, or the relationships of family members or friends.

Table 10.6: Some Major Positive (+) and Negative (–) Turning Points in a Relationship

Personal Compatibility/Homogamy

We spent a lot of time together. +

We had a big fight. –

We had similar interests. +

Compatibility with Family and Friends

My friends kept saying that Sue was bad for me. –

I fit right in with his family. +

Her dad just hated me. –

Other Random Forces

I just turned 21, so I don't want to be tied down to anyone yet. –

The guy I used to date started texting me. –

Information from Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999.

adult attachment styles The different ways in which adults relate to romantic partners, based on Mary Ainsworth's infant attachment styles. (Adult attachment styles are classified as *secure*, *preoccupied/ambivalent insecure*, or *avoidant/dismissive insecure*.)

preoccupied/ambivalent adult attachment An excessively clingy, needy style of relating to loved ones.

avoidant/dismissive adult attachment A standoffish, excessively disengaged style of relating to loved ones.

Wouldn't these same attachment categories apply to adult romantic love? Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987) had the same insight: Let's draw on Ainsworth's dimensions to classify people into different **adult attachment styles**.

People with a **preoccupied/ambivalent** type of insecure attachment fall quickly and deeply in love (see the How Do We Know box). But, because they are engulfing and needy, they often end up being rejected or feeling unfulfilled. Adults with an **avoidant/dismissive** attachment are at the opposite end of the spectrum — withholding, aloof, reluctant to engage. You may have dated this kind of person, someone whose mottoes are "stay independent," "don't share," "avoid getting close" (Feeney, 1999).

HOW DO WE KNOW . . .

that a person is securely or insecurely attached?

How do developmentalists classify adults as either securely or insecurely attached? In a classic procedure, researchers ask participants to describe their romantic relationships. Trained evaluators then code the responses.

People are labeled securely attached if they coherently describe the pluses and minuses of the relationship; if they talk freely about their desire for intimacy; and if they adopt an other-centered perspective, in which nurturing the other person's development is a primary goal. People who describe their relationship in formal or stilted ways, emphasize "autonomy issues," or talk about the advantages of being together in non-intimate terms ("We are buying a house"; "We go places"), are classified as avoidant/dismissive. Those who express total dependence ("I can't function unless she is nearby"), anger about not being treated correctly, or anxiety about the partner leaving are classified as preoccupied/ambivalent.

This in-depth interview technique is time-intensive. But many attachment researchers argue that it reveals a person's attachment style better than questionnaires in which people simply check "yes" or "no" to show whether items on a scale apply to them.



Secure adult attachment

- **Definition:** Capable of genuine intimacy in relationships.
- **Signs:** Empathic, sensitive, able to reach out emotionally; balances own needs with partner's; has affectionate, caring interactions; probably in a loving, long-term relationship.



Avoidant/dismissive adult attachment

- **Definition:** Unable to get close in relationships.
- **Signs:** Uncaring, aloof, emotionally distant; unresponsive to loving feelings; abruptly disengages at signs of involvement; unlikely to be in a long-term relationship.



Preoccupied/ambivalent adult attachment

- **Definition:** Needy and engulfing in relationships.
- **Signs:** Excessively jealous, suffocating; needs continual reassurance of being loved; unlikely to be in a loving, long-term relationship.

Securely attached adults are fully open to love. They give their partners space to differentiate, yet are firmly committed. Like Ainsworth's secure infants, their faces light up when they talk about their partner: The joy in their love shines through.

Decades of research show that insecurely attached emerging adults have trouble forming or keeping relationships (McNelis & Segrin, 2019). Securely attached people are more successful in love.

Securely attached adults tend to be happily married. They report more satisfying romances (Mikulincer and others, 2002). Securely attached adults hang in during difficult times. They freely support their partner in times of need. Using the metaphor of mother–infant attachment described in Chapter 4, people with secure attachments are wonderful dancers. They excel at being emotionally in step.

In Chapter 4, I discussed Bowlby and Ainsworth's idea that the dance of attachment between caregivers and babies is the basis for feeling securely attached in infancy and for dancing well in other relationships. Listen to friends anguishing over their relationship problems, and you will hear similar ideas: “The reason I act clingy is that, during childhood, I felt unloved”; “It's hard for me to warm up because my mom was rejecting and cold.”

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, infant attachment styles are *somewhat* consistent. Insecurely attached babies do tend to have more trouble regulating their emotions during romantic encounters as emerging adults (Girme and others, 2021). But recall from that chapter that childhood attachment styles also change. How much can these reactions shift from year to year as adults?

To answer this question, researchers measured the attachment styles of several hundred women over two years (Cozzarelli and others, 2003). They found that almost half of the women had changed categories over that time. So the good news is that we can change our attachment status from insecure to secure. And — as will come as no surprise — we can also move in the opposite direction, temporarily feeling insecurely attached after a terrible experience with love. The best way to understand attachment styles, then, is as *somewhat* enduring and consistent, arising, in part, from our current experiences in love.

One reason attachment styles stay stable is that they operate as an *evocative* self-fulfilling prophecy. A preoccupied, clingy person does tend to be rejected repeatedly. An avoidant individual remains isolated because piercing that armored shell takes such a heroic effort. A loving person gets more secure over time because caring behavior evokes warm, loving responses (Davila & Kashy, 2009).

Still, if you worry that you are insecurely attached and are committed to changing your unproductive ways of relating, there is heartening hope. Researchers found that, when adults were highly motivated to behave in more open, honest, loving ways, over time, they did get close to achieving this goal (Hudson and others, 2020)!

By now, you are probably impressed with the power of attachment theory to predict real-world love. But notice that these *correlational* findings have conceptual flaws. Suppose that a person labels his childhood as unhappy, has an insecure attachment style, and experiences relationship distress. It's tempting to say that “poor parenting” caused this insecure worldview, which then produced the current problems; but couldn't this connection operate in the opposite way? “I'm not getting along with my partner, so I believe love can't work out, and it must be my parents' fault.” Or couldn't these *self-reports* be caused by a third force — such as being depressed? If you have a gloomy worldview, wouldn't you see your childhood and current relationship as dissatisfying and also have an avoidant or preoccupied attachment style?

Still, as an approach to understanding people (and ourselves), the attachment styles framework has great appeal. Who can't relate to having a lover (or friend or parent) with a dismissive or preoccupied attachment? Don't the defining qualities of secure attachment give us a beautiful road map for how we should relate to the significant others in our lives?

secure adult attachment The genuine intimacy that is ideal in love relationships.

Evaluating Your Own Relationship

How can you use *all* of these section insights to ensure smooth-sailing romance? Select someone who is similar in values and interests, but don't necessarily search for a partner with your exact personality traits. Find someone who you respect as an individual, a person whose qualities embody the "self" you want to be — but it's best if you each differ in the need to take charge. Focus on the outstanding "special qualities" of your significant other, and, to cement your passion, share arousing flow states. Look for someone who is securely attached. Vow to be honest and faithful, and to work together as a team.

Still, however, notice the other implicit message of Table 10.6, describing relationship turning points: If things don't work out, it may have *nothing* to do with you, your partner, or any problem basic to how well you get along! If you want to evaluate your own relationship, you might take the questionnaire based on these chapter points in Table 10.7.

Table 10.7: Evaluating Your Own Relationship: A Section Summary Checklist

	No	Yes
1. Are you and your partner on the same wavelength in values, and did you connect over similar passions or flow states? <i>You don't have to be clones, but having mutual passions and regularly sharing those interests is a key to keeping passion alive.*</i>	☐	☐
2. Do you believe that your partner embodies your ideal self? <i>Looking up to your partner as someone you want to be like predicts staying together happily, as well as growing emotionally toward your ideal.</i>	☐	☐
3. Do you see your partner as utterly terrific and unique? <i>Deciding that this person has no human flaws is not necessary—but seeing your partner as "unique and special" predicts being happy together.</i>	☐	☐
4. Is your partner able to fully reach out in love, neither intensely jealous nor aloof? <i>Some jealousy or hesitation about commitment can be normal, but in general, your partner should be securely attached and able to love.</i>	☐	☐
5. Are you honest with each other and committed to being faithful and working as a team? <i>If you checked "yes," congratulations. You are in a committed relationship!</i>	☐	☐
<i>If you checked the "yes" box for all of these questions, you have an excellent relationship. If you checked the "no" box to every question, your relationship does not exist! One or two "no's" mixed in with "yes's" suggest areas that need work.</i>		
<i>I'll talk more about this advice in Chapter 11.</i>		

Final Thoughts: Social Media, the Blossoming Self, and the Attachment Response

Throughout this book, I've explored many specific consequences of the online revolution — some positive, others not so good. Now let's end this tour by looking at this topic in a comprehensive way. How has social media *generally* affected the way young people construct a secure, caring adult self?

Listen to pundits and you will hear dismal predictions (e.g., Twenge, 2019a, 2020b): By prioritizing superficial, online "friendships," social media deprives young people of the skills they need to fully relate. Comparing their lives to idealized virtual

peers makes today's teens and emerging adults narcissistic, insecure, and depressed. And, because it takes time away from school or reading this book, being tethered to social media has academic costs.

Now, due to the miracle of *meta-analyses*, the data is in. *On average, social media has a minor impact on young people's well-being* (Appel, Marker, & Gnambs, 2020)! But before concluding that the Internet revolution is benign, let's delve deeper.

These findings vary by culture. If people live in high-use nations, spending hours on social media correlates with feeling connected to family and friends. But in countries where this activity is less routine, atypically frequent social media use is a symptom of emotional distress (Boer and others, 2020).

The critical force worldwide (as I discussed in Chapter 8) is how young people use this tool. Do emerging adults obsessively check Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat, and get incredibly upset when deprived of being online? **Social media addiction** signals poor mental health (Boer and others, 2020; Fioravanti and others, 2020).

Who develops this condition? Recall from Chapter 8 that people who use social media to make negative comparisons to their peers are most at risk ("I need to keep checking Instagram even though seeing everyone's perfect selfies makes me feel bad"). Another is feeling worried about your social skills ("I have trouble relating in the real world, so I'm only comfortable chatting online") (Fioravanti and others, 2020).

Fear of missing out can be critical (Fabris and others, 2020): "I must check this app 50 times a day, or I'll be socially out of the loop." This obsession can provoke that annoying activity called phubbing, ignoring in-person family and friends in favor of scrolling through your phone (Fang and others, 2020). (No, it's not just bad manners; phubbing is a sign of social anxiety!)

Moreover, using the *experience-sampling method*, researchers found that when college students spent a good deal of time the day before an exam on Facebook, test anxiety rose several notches (Sternberg and others, 2020). Yes, social media (no surprise) is an easy procrastination tool.

But now that we've explored the downsides, here are two reasons why social media *can* smooth the passage to a loving, secure adult self.

Social Media Naturally Provokes Us to Act Prosocial Think of your reactions when you check some social media site. If you are like me, your immediate impulse is to post empathic comments in response to the joys and trials of friends ("That's awesome!" "You are brilliant!" "So sorry to hear that!" "Praying for you!"). You also may feel compelled to give helpful advice ("Check out this link!" "DM me if you need anything!"). Social media *magnifies* our biologically based tendency to be caring (Ng, 2020; see Chapter 4). For the first time in history, we can act prosocially during *each minute* of the day.

Social media also encourages offline prosocial acts. When researchers gave students vignettes relating to giving money to a charity, if the story specified that the fundraiser would post photos of that person on social media, participants vowed to donate to that cause. Being able to broadcast our good deeds online encourages doing good in the real world (Lavertu and others, 2020)!

Social Media Offers a Built-in, Secure Base for Dealing with Threat Plus, having access to social media allows us to get *immediate* attachment comfort by going online. Researchers asked college students to complete difficult math problems or prepare a stressful speech. Then, after this anxiety-provoking experience, they gave the volunteers a chance to go on social media or to read. Accessing social media was far more effective than reading at calming people down (Johnshoy and others, 2020).



How does regularly consulting and posting on social media affect this couple's mental health? You will get information right now and in Table 10.8.

social media addiction

A pathological practice involving the compulsion to constantly consult social media. This behavior is a symptom of insecurity and signals poor mental health.

Table 10.8: Yes or No? Research FAQs Related to Being Online

Question #1: My partner and I rely on Facebook. Should I worry if there is a huge assortment of potentially competing romantic possibilities on my lover's friend list?

Research answer: No, but be concerned if your partner is adding *new* friends. In one study with college students, the sheer number of romantic possibilities on a person's friend list had nothing to do with the odds that a partner would stray; but people who reported lower feelings of commitment were apt to solicit new Facebook friends (see Drouin, Miller, & Dibble, 2014). Moreover, since young people use social media to broadcast the fact that they are in a committed relationship (Krueger & Forest, 2020), you might legitimately worry if your lover doesn't post loving photos of the two of you online!

Question #2: My lover messages me millions of times every day. Does that mean this person is anxious about my love and generally insecure?

Research answer: Not necessarily, but, if your partner *only* texts rather than talking personally through FaceTime or Zoom or in real life, it may signal problems. Texting at unusual hours, such as late at night, is also symptomatic of being insecurely attached (Lepp, Li, & Barkley, 2016). So, when a lover's texts regularly pop up at inappropriate times — let's say at 3 A.M. on a weekday — this person may indeed feel uneasy about your love.

Question #3: I'm one of those rare people who isn't thrilled about social media. I minimize this distracting activity as much as possible. I'm passionate to learn about the world in other ways. Does this mean I have emotional problems?

Research answer: Not at all. Congratulations! As a happy, high-functioning introvert, you may be well on your way to becoming identity achieved (V. Thomas and others, 2021).

A compelling example involves going to college. In one survey, undergraduates reported that in confronting this difficult transition, they relied on their Facebook friends. And having 24/7 access to this virtual “secure” base gave these young people the courage to reach out and form new attachments at their school (Thomas, Orme, & Kerrigan, 2020).

So returning to my hypothetical study in the research methods section of Chapter 1, we might predict that teenagers who use social media frequently are not necessarily depressed. Social media has different effects depending on how we use this tool — to make us feel more emotionally secure, or to drag us down. And now that we can immediately bond in so many virtual ways, such as on Zoom, FaceTime, and Skype, being online has become our *critical lifeline* for becoming attached as adults.

Table 10.8 offers specific research findings relating to online love. Now it's time to move *fully* into adult roles by discussing marriage, parenthood, and work.

Tying It All Together

- Orulo is discussing how twenty-first-century relationships have changed. Which of these statements is *correct*?
 - Today, young people are more likely to marry outside of their social class.
 - Today, same-sex relationships are much more acceptable.
 - Today, homophobia no longer exists.
- Today, most young people meet their partners through *family/friends/the Internet*, and people who meet online are *less/more* apt to be happily married than their counterparts who meet in traditional ways. (Select the correct options.)
- Natasha and Akbar met at a friend's New Year's Eve party and just started dating. They are about to find out whether they share similar interests, backgrounds, and worldviews. This couple is in Murstein's (choose one) *stimulus/value-comparison/role* phase of romantic relationships.
- Aicel tells Kelly, “To have a happy relationship, find someone as similar to you as possible.” Go back and review this section. Then list the ways in which Aicel is somewhat wrong.

5. Rita is clingy and always feels rejected. Esther runs away from intimate relationships. Nam-gi is affectionate and loving. Match the attachment status of each person to one of the following alternatives: *secure*; *avoidant/dismissive*; *preoccupied*.
6. Camilla agonizes that social media impairs the transition to adult life. Given the research, you should tell her:
 - a. Absolutely yes. Social media is typically bad for young people's mental health.
 - b. Absolutely no. Social media is typically beneficial for young people's mental health.
 - c. I can't make definitive conclusions. It depends on how a particular young person uses social media.

Answers to the Tying It All Together questions can be found at the end of this chapter.



SOMETHING TO CONSIDER: Constructing an Adult Life: Adult Attachment and Choosing a Partner Achieve

SUMMARY

Setting the Context

Psychologists have identified a new life phase called **emerging adulthood**. This in-between, not-quite-fully-adult time of life—which begins after high school and tapers off by the late twenties—involves testing out adult roles. Because young people haven't reached the standard benchmarks of adulthood—finding a career, getting married, becoming parents—for an extended time, we see the essence of adulthood as taking responsibility for one's life. In southern Europe, young people typically live with their parents into their thirties because of religious and financial constraints. In Scandinavia, **cohabitation** is widely accepted and marriage is optional. In the Nordic nations, better economies, an emphasis on independence, and government assistance make early **nest-leaving** the norm. In the United States, there are striking social-class differences. While most young people plan to marry, low-income adults have trouble making it to that state.

We traditionally think of the entry point of emerging adulthood as leaving the nest. But while older research suggests parent-child relationships improve after emerging adults move out, today young people stay at home for financial reasons. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, living at home during emerging adulthood has been transformed from “abnormal” to a typical state!

Social-clock pressures, or **age norms**, set the boundaries of emerging adulthood. Exploring is **on time**, or appropriate, in the twenties, but **off time** if it extends well into the thirties. Social-clock pressures to get our adult lives in order make emerging adulthood a time of special stress.

Constructing an Identity

Identity, or finding one's true adult self is, according to Erikson, the major challenge facing people on the brink of adulthood. Erikson believed that exploring various possibilities is critical to developing a solid identity. The alternative is **role confusion**—drifting and seeing no adult future.

James Marcia identified four **identity statuses**: **identity diffusion** (drifting aimlessly), **identity foreclosure** (leaping into an identity without any thought), **moratorium** (exploring different pathways), and **identity achievement** (settling on an identity). Although Marcia's idea that we progress through moratorium and reach achievement by our thirties seems correct, people shift statuses throughout life. Emerging adults may not need to sample different fields to develop a secure career identity. Being locked in **ruminative moratorium** produces special pain. **Ethnic identity** is immensely positive, if emerging adults are attached to their roots and committed to succeeding in society, too. People with **biracial or multiracial identities** face special struggles, but may have unusually solid self-esteem.

Finding a Career

Teenagers have lofty career goals. The downside is that, because many teens overinflate their abilities, self-esteem often drops when young people enter college. While people who enjoy mastering challenges (“workers”) are set up to flourish during emerging adulthood, the twenties are a time of emotional growth. Troubled teens can be very successful if they find satisfying jobs.

Flow is a feeling of total absorption in a challenging task. The hours pass like minutes, intrinsic motivation is high, and skills are in balance with the demands of a given task. Flow states can alert people to their ideal careers.

Although higher education is important to constructing a middle-class life, and most young people in the United States enroll in college, a high fraction may drop out before finishing. Academically talented youth from low-income backgrounds are less apt to graduate than their affluent counterparts. We should make it easier for financially strapped young people to get a B.A. and offer non-college alternatives that lead directly to jobs. The absence of a real **school-to-work transition** in the United States is a national crisis.

College should be a time of inner growth. Get the best professors, explore career-relevant work, become involved in campus activities, and reach out to students of different backgrounds.

Finding Love

Erikson's first adult task, **intimacy**—finding committed love—has changed dramatically in recent decades. People now find romance online and are far more likely to marry outside their ethnic group, although partner choices are more stratified by income today. Despite enduring **homophobia**, differences in **sexual orientation** are far more acceptable in the West. **Transgender** youth, however, face special discrimination during life. The dating phase of life lasts longer, with many young people putting off serious romantic involvements or having on- and off-again relationships. Unfortunately, **relationship churning** has downsides, and romantic breakups take an emotional and physical toll. Having a loving partner is very helpful during the tumultuous emerging adult years.

Stimulus-value-role theory spells out a three-stage process leading to marriage. First, people select a potential partner who looks appropriate (the **stimulus phase**); then, during the **value-comparison phase**, they find out whether they have common interests. Finally, during the **role phase**, couples plan their lives together. **Homogamy**, people's tendency to choose similar

partners and people of equivalent status and social value, is the main principle underlying this theory.

A variety of forces (such as connecting via similar flow states and mutual interests) make homogamy the underlying force driving romance. However, relationships flourish when people respect their partner's personality, and two very dominant (or submissive) personalities might not mesh. It helps to inflate a lover's virtues and view a partner as embodying one's "ideal self." Seeing relationships as progressing in static ways misses the real-world magic of finding love.

Researchers have spelled out three **adult attachment styles**. Adults ranked as insecurely attached—either **preoccupied/ambivalent** (overly clingy and engulfing) or **avoidant/dismissive** (overly aloof and detached)—have poorer-quality relationships. **Securely attached adults** tend to be successful in love and marriage. The attachment-styles framework offers fascinating insights into the qualities we should search for in finding fulfilling love.

Finally, despite the dire predictions, social media has mixed effects on our passage to adult life. The online revolution enhances our ability to reach out in love, and can provoke pro-social behavior offline. Connecting virtually gives us a secure base during times of threat. However, **social media addiction** is poisonous to mental health.

KEY TERMS

adult attachment styles,
p. 302

age norms, p. 284

avoidant/dismissive adult
attachment, p. 302

biracial or multiracial identity,
p. 289

cohabitation, p. 282

emerging adulthood, p. 281

ethnic identity, p. 288

flow, p. 291

homogamy, p. 300

homophobia, p. 298

identity, p. 285

identity achievement, p. 286

identity diffusion, p. 286

identity foreclosure, p. 286

identity statuses, p. 286

intimacy, p. 296

moratorium, p. 286

nest-leaving, p. 282

off time, p. 284

on time, p. 284

preoccupied/ambivalent adult
attachment, p. 302

relationship churning, p. 299

role confusion, p. 286

role phase, p. 299

reflective moratorium,
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school-to-work transition,
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secure adult attachment,
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sexual orientation, p. 297

social clock, p. 284

social media addiction, p. 305

stimulus phase, p. 299

stimulus-value-role theory,
p. 299

transgender, p. 298

value-comparison phase,
p. 299



ANSWERS TO Tying It All Together QUIZZES

Setting the Context

1. (b) Hui may not finish college within four years.
2. False—in our current economy, staying in the nest is a practical adult choice.
3. Beatriz, who is starting a new career at age 45, will be most worried about the ticking of the social clock.

Constructing an Identity

1. drifting; diffusion
2. foreclosure; moratorium. Tayen is most apt to have an emotional problem.
3. Do you feel a nursing career expresses your inner self?
4. Having a strong ethnic identity *could be positive or negative, depending on whether a young person engages productively in society.*

Finding a Career

1. overly high; become more mature
2. flow
3. Josiah might argue that prior academic performance predicts college completion, as high school graduates with under 3.0 GPAs have less than 50/50 odds of graduating from college. Jocasta should reply that

money is crucial because academically talented low-income kids are far less likely to finish college than their affluent peers, and dropouts cite “financial issues” as their main reason for leaving.

4. (b)

Finding Love

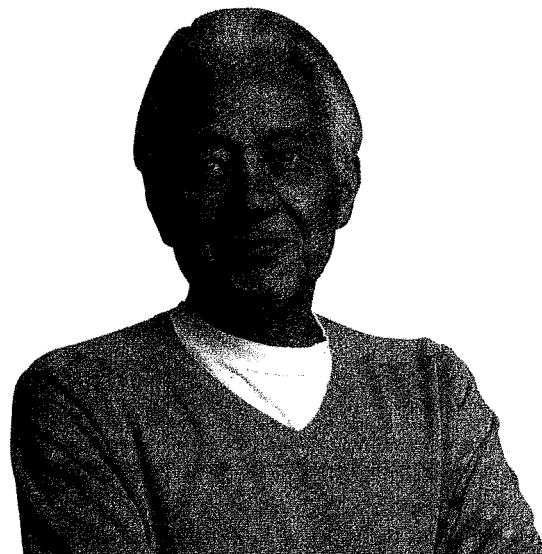
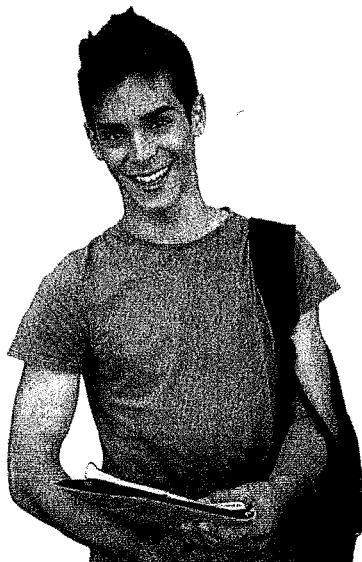
1. (b)
2. Today, most young people meet their partners through *the Internet*, and people who meet online are *more* apt to be happily married than their counterparts who meet in traditional ways.
3. value-comparison phase
4. Actually, people who have dominant personalities might be better off with more submissive mates (and vice versa). We gravitate to people with good personalities. Rather than searching for a clone, it's best to find a mate who is similar to one's ideal self. Overinflating that person's virtues helps tremendously, too!
5. Rita's status is preoccupied. Esther is avoidant/dismissive. Nam-gi is securely attached.
6. The answer is (c), because the critical force is how young people use social media.

CONNECT ONLINE:

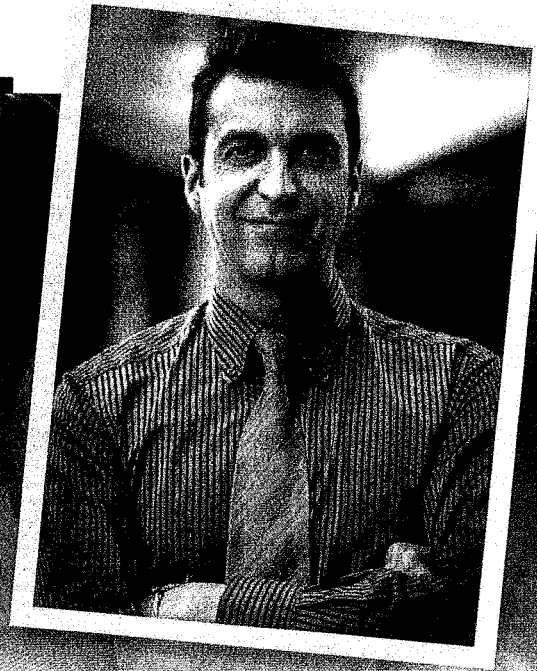


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CHAPTER 11



Social Development: Relationships and Roles

Home at 3 A.M. from closing the store and hopefully to bed by 4. Then, Declan's life-love, Jamila, wakes up, gets the kids ready for school, and shuffles to the computer to begin her latest Web-design job.

Declan's first marriage to Prithy ended in a disastrous divorce. He feels blessed to have a second chance for happiness at age 35. Declan and Jamila feel confident that this marriage will last. They are older and more mature. In this uncertain economy, they are both blessed to have decent jobs. They understand that marriage involves sacrifice. They are committed to each other's emotional growth.

After struggling to connect with the twins, Declan finally feels that his stepchildren see him as their real dad—he knows he would give his life for these precious children. Declan wants to make enough money to give the kids a top-notch education and allow Jamila to enjoy motherhood, rather than enduring those exhausting weeks when she gets an assignment, then goes crazy finishing that project at superhuman speed.

That's why Declan "supplemented" his store manager position with driving for a ride-sharing company. Declan has no problem working two jobs. But he worries. Suppose he gets furloughed or permanently laid off. How will being unemployed affect his mission to provide for his family? It's a 24/7 struggle, but this marriage must last for life!

Do you know someone like Declan who is struggling to be a caring husband and sensitive father while supporting his family? Perhaps you are coping with the threat of unemployment, or, like Jamila, are overwhelmed

with bursts of high-stress work. If so, you are a contemporary adult.

This chapter is devoted to the main social challenges involved with being adult. It focuses on the three classic roles that define adult life: marriage (and living

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Marriage

Setting the Context: The Changing Landscape of Marriage

The Main Marital Pathway: Downhill and Then (Maybe) Up

The Triangular Theory Perspective on Happiness

Commitment, Sacrifice, and Compassion: Core Attitudes in Relationship Success

Couple Communications and Happiness

• *Interventions:* Staying Together Happily for Life

Final Notes: Divorce (and Remarriage)

Parenthood

Setting the Context: More Parenting Possibilities, Fewer Children

The Transition to Parenthood

Exploring Motherhood

Exploring Fatherhood

Work

Setting the Context: The Changing Landscape of Work

Exploring Career Happiness (and Success)

• *Trending in Developmental Science:* Exploring the Enduring Difficulties Women Face at Work

Final Thoughts: Reflections on a Timely Concern — Unemployment