**Emerging Adulthood**

Led by the work of the psychology professor Jeffrey Arnet and his article "[Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties](http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/articles/ARNETT_Emerging_Adulthood_theory.pdf)," emerging adulthood considers the period from the late teens through twenties as a time of distinct psychological and behavioral characteristics that in more affluent countries may result in individuals’ taking longer to move out of their parents’ home, involve themselves in a career, get married, and have children. [[1](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

**How It’s Developing**

Arnet’s concept of emerging adulthood grows out of his observations of young people from both Generation X and the Millennial generation and the ways that society, culture, and the economy have created a new period of development. [[2](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)] Anecdotes and data point to individuals taking longer to achieve sociologists’ five milestones of adulthood – completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child. [[3](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

At the same time, some scientists are exploring biological reasons behind this distinctive period of life, connecting perceived ambivalence and delayed decision-making in twenty-somethings to new findings in brain development. [[4](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

The emerging adulthood trend is often associated with circumstances brought on by the recent economic downturn, which provided fewer entry-level jobs for young people, limited housing options, and influenced some young people to extend their academic studies. Even as the economy recovers behaviors for this demographic may not change. The competition within the high-end labor market is stiff, a result of several graduating classes’ competition for positions, the extended careers of those already in the workforce, greater demand for education and experience (e.g. post-graduate internships), more job movement, and candidates’ own preference for stimulating, creative and even glamorous jobs. [[5](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

**Why It Matters**

Publishing trends, including the “New Adult” genre, demonstrate the opportunities for services and products marketed to those in between established young adult and adult categories. Libraries might also begin thinking about programs and services that capitalize on this demographic, borrowing some ideas from young adult services (video games, media, socials) and adult services (career resources) to appeal to this category.

In the same way that adolescence became a recognized developmental stage, leading to distinctions in education, health care, social services, and laws that addressed the specific experiences of teenagers, emerging adulthood may come to be recognized as a distinct developmental stage and warrant similar distinctive accommodations. [[6](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

Libraries and librarians interested in connecting with young people in their 20s may be able to capitalize on existing relationships with older adults, especially if, as some research suggests, younger generations experiencing “emerging adulthood” still communicate with and are influenced by their parents. [[7](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/future/trends/emergingadulthood#Notes and Resources)]

Significant changes in home ownership, educational attainment, workforce entry, and even family planning patterns could significantly disrupt communities’ composition and the funding sources that communities generate. If emerging adulthood has a significant enough effect on these patterns, libraries may need to adjust their services and plans.

**Notes and Resources**

[1] “Is ‘Emerging Adulthood’ Really a Thing? The Secret History of Words for Young People.” Jeff Sherwood. *Slate*. August 22, 2014. Available from [http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon\_valley/2014/08/22/emerging\_adults\_tee...](http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2014/08/22/emerging_adults_teenagers_adolescents_and_other_words_for_young_people_are.html)

[2] “The Neuroscience of 20-Somethings.” Ferris Jabr. *Scientific American*. August 29, 2012. Available from[http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/brainwaves/2012/08/29/the-neuroscien...](http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/brainwaves/2012/08/29/the-neuroscience-of-twenty-somethings/)

[3] “All Grown Up: Have You Completed the 5 Milestones of Adulthood?” Mary Anne Barone. *The Nest*. May 17, 2012. Available from [http://blog.thenest.com/2012/05/17/all-grown-up-have-you-completed-the-5...](http://blog.thenest.com/2012/05/17/all-grown-up-have-you-completed-the-5-milestones-of-adulthood/)

[4] “The Neuroscience of 20-Somethings.” Ferris Jabr. *Scientific American*. August 29, 2012. Available from[http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/brainwaves/2012/08/29/the-neuroscien...](http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/brainwaves/2012/08/29/the-neuroscience-of-twenty-somethings/)

[5] “Where Have the Good Men Gone?” Kay S. Hymowitz. *The Wall Street Journal*. February 19, 2011. Available from<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704409004576146321725889448>

[6] “What is It About 20-Somethings?” Robin Marantz Henig. *The New York Times*. August 18, 2010. Available from<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html>

[7] “You Can Go Home Again.” Karen L. Fingerman and Frank F. Furstenburg. *The New York Times*. May 30, 2012. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/31/opinion/the-parent-trap.html>