

**SOC 574: Transition to Adulthood
Half Course**

Rutgers University
Spring 2008

Professor: Patrick Carr
Class Time: Mon. 4.10-6.50
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Introduction

This course is designed as an introduction to a rapidly emerging area of scholarship in social science, namely, the transition to adulthood. Though sociologists, anthropologists, and social psychologists (to name just a few sub-fields) have always examined the passage to adulthood, in the past decade there has been an unprecedented upsurge in the amount of scholarly, and indeed, popular attention to this field. In the seven weeks of this course, I would like for you to get a sense of both the current state of knowledge with respect to the transition to adulthood, and whence many of the ideas and notions that are used to explain the current state of emerging adulthood, as Jeffrey Arnett labels it.

Though we don't have the scope to complete a comprehensive survey of the field, I hope to provide you with a solid introduction to the work out there. One of the central themes of the course and indeed the field is the notion of change. What has ignited this field is the sense that something has changed about the journey from adolescence to adulthood, and though the comparison is often made between what young people did in the 1950s as opposed to now, some work uses a longer lens to examine the shifts in behavior. We will examine much of this work and we will focus on three main areas of scholarship; the empirical and theoretical mapping of emerging adulthood (weeks 2-4); the qualitative examinations of what it means to be an adult in the early twenty-first century (week 5), and the transition to adulthood for vulnerable populations (week 6). The final week will examine some of the central questions about this field that remain to be answered and the directions for future research.

We will start with a small foray into some of the popular treatments of emerging adulthood, examining what the popular press has termed aduolescents, twixters, and kippers, and we will also assess how popular culture takes stock of the "failure to launch" phenomenon.

Reading

I have ordered two books for this course, and there are some titles that I would suggest you add to your collection, if this is an area in which you think you will concentrate in the future. Most of the course reading is in the form of journal articles or chapters, and the bulk of this material will be directly available to you on the course web site. The remainder will be on electronic reserve. There is quite a lot of reading each week and you will be expected to keep up with these assignments.

Ordered Books

Arnett, Jeffrey, Jensen (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Osgood, D. Wayne, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan, and Gretchen Ruth [Eds.] (2005). *On Your Own Without A Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Suggested Titles

Mitchell, Barbara (2006). *The Boomerang Age: Transitions to Adulthood in Families*. Edison, NJ: Transaction Books.

Settersten, Richard A., Frank F. Furstenberg and Ruben G. Rumbaut [Eds.] (2004). *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Requirements

There are three assignments that make up the bulk of your grade in this course (80% in all). The remaining 20% of your grade is awarded for your overall engagement in the course. This is a small class and its success is very much dependent on the effort you put forth each week in being prepared and contributing to the best of your ability. I will lecture for the first part of each class, but the remainder of class will be spent discussing the week's readings and

Assignment 1: Class Discussion Leader (20%)

Each participant will have the opportunity to lead a class discussion on selected readings. The class leader will be responsible for distributing a set of questions/discussion points/topics that come from their reading of the selected materials for the week. The list should be distributed to the class at least two days before the class, ideally by the Friday evening before the following Monday's class. The class leader will also be responsible for guiding the discussion in the second part of the class that week.

Assignment 2: Critique Exercise (20%)

The second assignment is a straightforward critique exercise. You will be asked to choose a set of readings or book, either ones that are assigned for the course or work that is in this substantive area and is approved for the exercise. You will be expected to write a 5-page critique of the work, assessing where it fits into the substantive area of the transition to adulthood, and assess it with regard to the other scholarship you have read in the field. There is a rolling deadline for the critique exercise—you can hand it in any time up to **March 3**.

Assignment 3: Crafting a Research Question on T2A (40%)

The final assignment is for you to use the course to craft a research question on some aspect of the transition to adulthood. The research question will run roughly 5-7 pages and will elaborate your rationale for wanting to do the research, i.e. what we can hope to learn from your project. For most of you this will be an intellectual exercise in that you will most likely never actually do the research, but you should proceed as if this were your life's work! So you should briefly summarize the key scholarship that informs your question, identifying the gaps that need to be filled and you should suggest what methods are best suited to gathering the data to answer your question. The deadline for completed research question is **MARCH 14**.

Class Schedule

January 28: Introduction to the Course: The Problem of Generations?

Readings: Lev Grossman “Grow Up? Not so Fast”; Peg Tyre “Bringing Up Adulthood”; Furstenberg et al. “Growing Up is Harder to Do”; Kantrowicz and Tyre: “the Fine Art of Letting Go.”

February 4: The Emergence of Emerging Adulthood: The Field from the 1970s through 1990s

Readings: Hogan: “The Variable Order of Events in the Life Course”; Hogan and Astone: “The Transition to Adulthood”; Marini “Age and Sequencing Norms in the Transition to Adulthood”; Goldscheider et al. “A Portrait of the Nest-Leaving process in Early Adulthood.”

Recommended: Clausen: “Adolescent Competence and the Shaping of the Life Course”

February 11: Social Psychological Approaches to the Transition

Reading: Arnett (2004) especially chapters 1-2; 4-7; 10. Schwartz et al. “Identity and Agency in Emerging Adulthood: Two Developmental Routes in the Individualization Process.”

February 18: Sociological Mapping of Emerging Adulthood

Reading: Shanahan: "Pathways to Adulthood in Changing Societies: Variability and Mechanisms in Life Course Perspective." Furstenberg: "The Sociology of Adolescence and Youth in the 1990s: A Critical Commentary." Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten: "On the Frontier of Adulthood: Emerging Themes and New Directions." Osgood et al. "Six Paths to Adulthood."

Recommended: Mouw "Sequences of Early Adult Transitions: A Look at Variability and Consequences."

February 25: When did you Consider Yourself an Adult? Qualitative Examinations of the Transition to Adulthood

Reading: Selected chapters from *Coming of Age in America*. Kefalas et al. "Marriage is More than Being Together: the Meaning of Marriage for Young Adults."

March 3: The Perilous Passage: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations

Reading: Osgood et al. "Introduction" to *On Your Own Without a Net*, chapters by Uggen and Wakefield, Hagan and McCarthy, Courtney and Heuring in Osgood et al. Carr and Napolitano: "I want to be making it and going to school."

NOTE: FINAL DEADLINE FOR CRITIQUE EXERCISE

March 10: Future Directions for Emerging Adulthood

Reading: Settersten "Social Policy and the Transition to Adulthood: Toward Stronger Institutions and Individual Capacities." Foster et. al "The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Youth and Families: Common Themes and Future Directions" in Osgood et al. Arnett "Suffering, Selfish, Slackers? Myth and Reality About Emerging Adults" Mitchell "Back to the Future: Is the Boomerang Age Here to Stay?"

MARCH 14: RESEARCH QUESTIONS DUE