Varda Konstam

Emerging and Young Adulthood

Multiple Perspectives, Diverse Narratives

Second Edition

Springer

Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development

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USA

To my daughter Amanda and son Jeremy,
my teachers, and to my loving husband Marv.

Preface

I am delighted to write a second edition of *Emerging and Young Adulthood: Multiple Perspectives, Diverse Narratives*. The second edition is an opportunity to revisit fertile ground represented by the textured voices of the individuals who are in the midst of negotiating this challenging developmental period, as well as parents and employers. It is also an opportunity to refine observations and conclusions based on a rich, evolving literature. Emerging and young adults continue to sustain my curiosity and appreciation, and it is in this spirit that I have written the second edition of *Emerging and Young Adulthood: Multiple Perspectives, Diverse Narratives*.

I have updated each chapter to reflect the current literature, with substantial revision in certain areas, particularly Chap. 8: "Voices of Emerging and Young Adults: From the Professional to the Personal." In addition, I have added two chapters: "The Virtual Life Alongside: Technology and the Emerging and Young Adult" (Chap. 4), and "Floundering or Experimenting: Finding a Vocational Home" (Chap. 7). The rationale for these changes is described below.

Technology permeates, or may even dominate, the lives of emerging and young adults. Because technology is a source of empowerment and community, anxiety and distraction, and a venue for demonstrating the best and worst of human nature, it seemed essential to explore its reciprocal effects.

Identifying and consolidating a career has assumed center stage in the lives of emerging and young adults. Many emerging and young adults are navigating non-linear and unconventional career paths, a process for which they may find little precedent or guidance. Following such a course, it may be difficult to identify pathways and behavioral strategies that lead to an outcome of a satisfying career, rather than one of disappointment and stagnation. Exploration and experimentation can result in uniquely successful outcomes. However, at some point they may cease to be adaptive. Chapter 7 addresses many of the concerns being raised by employers, parents, and emerging and young adults, who are questioning these routes.

Chapter 8 has been substantially revised to present a developmental framework for understanding the degree of stress emerging and young adults are

experiencing. Although this transition period is a time to experiment with values, commitments, and possible selves, it may also be a period of overwhelming choice and confusion. The highly competitive and unstable environment and the inadequate structural supports facing many emerging and young adults often lead to emotional vulnerability. Emerging and young adults find themselves psychologically at risk for a range of mental health disorders, such as major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder. Chapter 8 addresses the issues related to how social and personal development for emerging and young adults can be overshadowed by feelings of uncertainty and instability.

I wish to thank three exceptional individuals, (two of whom are emerging adults), whom it has been my pleasure to work with: Teyana Curran, Samantha Karwin, and Mark Nickels. Their outstanding research skills, keen insights, and editing abilities have truly enhanced this book. I am forever grateful and honored to know them; their "presence" and commitment to this topic is noteworthy and inspiring. I am also grateful for the support that Laura Brennan, James Gardner, and Victor Peralta provided on this project.

Finally, at the time of the first edition, my two children were either entering emerging adulthood or in the throes of navigating this challenging period. I was frequently baffled by their choices, choices that could have far-reaching implications for their futures. As I mention in the first edition of this book, when under press, I would often resort to the position that my children would profit from picking up the pace and living their lives using developmental markers familiar to me. Both "wandered" from their initial course and appear to be all the better for the journey. Thank you, Amanda and Jeremy, for being my teachers and having faith in my abilities to shift set and learn from your experiences.

Contents

Chapter 1
Emerging and Young Adults: An Introduction

Emerging and young adults, a group that will represent more than one out of three adults in the United States by 2020, are perplexing, their essence hard-to-pin down. They are in a period of transition, intrigued, angered, and confounded by a world in flux, a world where ambiguity and uncertainty prevail. They may be the first generation without the illusion that the world they will grow old in will not look anything like the world they live in now. On entering this stage, known structures such as school and home are replaced by the unknown and unfamiliar. The environmental and cultural context emerging and young adults have to navigate feels like an overwhelming present and an uncertain future. It is therefore not surprising that this life stage has been described as one of the most complex and challenging (Tanner and Yabiku 1999).

Being an emerging or young adult is a qualitatively different experience today when compared to previous generations. *Each* generation, over the last century, has taken longer to assume the roles of adulthood than the previous one. Rather than viewing this as a problem to be fixed, it can be viewed as a natural development, given that the world has grown progressively more complex and that life expectancy has increased.

Depending on the culture, this developmental period varies in length and those boundaries are no longer as clear as they once were (Arnett 2004). Progress toward becoming an adult is incremental and ongoing. The period of emerging adulthood, originally identified by Arnett to include ages 18–25, has been expanded to include ages "18–30, at least when college students are studied" (Cote 2006, p. 108). It has been acknowledged that many of the developmental markers identified by Arnett (2004) apply to individuals in their early 30s, and more recently research efforts may focus on "Millennials," a group comprised of individuals ranging in age from 18 to 34 (e.g., Pew Research Center 2014). For the purpose of this text, I made a deliberate decision to interview individuals with a fresh perspective, focusing on an age range of 25–35 that expands much of the

existing literature and perhaps more accurately depicts the upward range of the transition period to young adulthood.

How can we increase our understanding of individuals in their 20s, described by some as self-absorbed, floundering, aimless, irresponsible, delayed, hedonistic, immature, and above all, narcissistic (Twenge 2006; Twenge et al. 2008) when others find evidence to dismiss this characterization, and attribute many of these traits to the youth of every generation? (Roberts et al. 2010). How does the environmental and cultural context help us understand shifts in behavior, or a delay in developmental markers typically associated with this period? Arnett (2006) identifies five developmental markers of individuals negotiating their 20s:

1. It is the age of *identity explorations*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. It is the age of *instability*.
3. It is the most *self-focused* age of life.
4. It is the age of *feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. It is the age of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (p. 8)

The 20s are acknowledged as a critical time in identity formation. Yet most research on identity focuses on its development in adolescence, with few studies exploring its consolidation (Arnett 2000, 2004; Waterman 1999). Criteria for entry into adulthood include: (a) accepting responsibility for oneself; (b) making independent decisions; and (c) becoming financially independent (Nelson 2003). These criteria are gradual and incremental (Arnett 2004), and are consistent with the perceptions of young Americans and their individualistic view of adulthood. Interestingly, in contrast to more traditional cultures, marriage in America is no longer the definitive marker that indicates passage into adulthood (Schlegel and Barry 1991; Arnett 1998, 2011; Kefalas et al. 2011). Individuals in their 20s and early 30s are making plans for a future that is uncertain. Understanding the contextual landscape and listening to the voices of those navigating this developmental period as well as those who have emerged from it, enriches the discussion.

A Contextual Perspective

In the new century, motivated first by corporate downsizing and restructuring, then by the global recession of 2008, Millennials are assuming new attitudes and behaviors regarding the world of work. Social and cultural changes, still an echo from the social movements of two generations ago, continue to lead to lifestyle choice debates, the questioning of institutional commitments, and to the development of new structures of intimacy and family. In response to a changing employment picture, emerging adults entering the work force are advised to assume an open, flexible stance, and simultaneously to let go of cherished notions of security:

it is now axiomatic that long-term service to a single employer is a relic of the past. Educational expectations have dramatically changed with respect to employment opportunities. Labor economists predict that 62 % of the jobs in the United States will require post-secondary education by 2018; in contrast, in 1973 only 28 % of employment sites required a degree beyond high school (Rothman 2012).

Individuals in their 20s and 30s sense the uncertainty around them. The rules that have previously enabled them to function and thrive in familiar environments (i.e., school settings) no longer apply. There is a "serious disjuncture" between the period of adolescence and the developmental tasks associated with that stage of development and emerging and young adulthood (Cote 2000, p. 29). Postponement of the structuring of careers as well as other facets of life may be a natural sequel, given the complex, unpredictable environment emerging adults encounter. Flach (1988) had foresight in this regard:

> Perhaps in the absence of sheer necessity, direction is hard to find. Or perhaps these emerging adults feel the need to extend the chaos and take longer than one would expect of them to grow up, sensing that the future is indeed quite unpredictable, recognizing the dramatic acceleration of events that has occurred, and following the dictates of nature that suggested that the young, unformed, pliable creature has a better chance of evolutionary survival than the one that matures too quickly and becomes frozen, unable to adapt to a drastically alien environmental condition, the …twenty-first century. (pp. 70–71).

Who are these emerging and young adults, and what meanings do they assign to this time in their life? Sixty-four individuals ranging in age from 25 to 35 were interviewed to capture their experiences as they negotiated this developmental juncture. Thirty-one grew up in affluent suburbs in the northeast, and 33, alumni of a commuter, public university that serves a diverse population of first generation college graduates, participated. In addition, 30 parents of individuals 25–35 years of age, and 30 employers, were interviewed for the purpose of generating a more nuanced, textured narrative. All of the individuals interviewed were volunteers (please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed description of the participants). In keeping with the intent of this second edition text, additional case studies appear throughout the book to provide a more current, textured, and encompassing discussion of the issues.

Although our understanding of this developmental period is incomplete, much of what we do know is limited to individuals from the American majority culture (Cote 2000; Wainryb 2004). The existing literature on emerging and young adulthood over represents the middle and upper classes. Given that a significant subset of emerging and young adults have been neglected in the literature (i.e., individuals who are poor or working class, immigrants, individuals from minority cultures) generalizations cannot be made from a majority of the reported findings.

Throughout this book, I will attempt to give voice to populations who are relatively "silent" in the existing literature; much work, however, remains with respect to this crucial goal. It is important to note that the voices represented are primarily college graduates, all volunteers, located in a specific context, an urban northeastern city and its surrounding communities.

Adam, Maria, James, Sahasra, and Lily

Adam, Maria, James, Sahasra, and Lily are five individuals with varying experiences and worldviews in the process of navigating or emerging from their 20s. Although their experiences do not represent everyone who was interviewed or the full spectrum of issues encountered, they provide a window on the diversity of emerging adult choices and their aspirations.

Adam

Adam is a single, 34-year-old self-employed consultant in financial services in the midst of launching a second company. At age 27, Adam started his first company with a partner and grew it to include 15 employees. He sold the company at age 30 with a considerable profit, and, as he describes it, just prior to an economic downturn. Both of his entrepreneurial endeavors called upon his expertise in computers; his latest company addresses the need for innovative cloud computing. Since his graduation 12 years ago from a large urban northeastern university, Adam has held four jobs related to financial services. To supplement profits from the sale of his first company, he engages in financial services consulting work.

As I attempted to schedule an interview with Adam, I immediately felt immersed in his world. He responded to my request by indicating availability anytime during the weekend. He expressed no time preferences. Unable to stifle my clinical training, I wondered whether Adam had difficulties setting boundaries and whether this young man had a life outside of work. In describing himself vis-à-vis his work life, Adam states:

> I'm a risk taker, but I am not one of these guys where the business needs to revolve around me. [I] would rather share and have complementary skills. My previous partner and I, we were never on the same page, but it was good. We brought different skills to the table. I do not think I am smart enough. You got to test everything; if you have an idea you have to test it with your partner. You should fight for your ideas, untested ideas. If you cannot convince your business partner, who has the same long-term goals, how are you going to convince anyone else? That is why you need to be open-minded, rather than listening to the ideas that you already know and not feel stress.

At age 30, Adam realized what he needed from his work environment, specifically the work-related conditions that would enable him to thrive. His newfound understanding co-occurred with the selling of his company. He was not happy in the four jobs he assumed post-college in his 20s.

> I tried a lot of jobs, [but] was not happy in any of them. The common thread was, I could not deal with a boss. I *would* love a mentor. I like building stuff, and I have a high tolerance for risk. My idea of a good job is working 24 h six months and then taking a break, opposite to what the average person wants. They have a life and want it. It doesn't work for me. I have been in startups, and they have been extremely exciting.

When asked about the current economic climate and the context in which he works, Adam responded philosophically, stating that the meaning and significance of work, as well as actual practices, are evolving:

> It [work] is a continuing part of a total transformation of work and society. Just one example, if you are reasonably willing to hustle, you can survive perfectly well, doing your work remotely on the Internet, maybe visit your clients once a month, and live anywhere in the world. Compare that to 20 years ago. What is happening in India is … [transformational]. Fast Internet connections change the nature of work. It is sad for me to think that people don't think there is opportunity out there. The world economy is so diverse. Anyone who is willing to hustle and work hard can find something that they can be happy doing, not only just surviving… or staying in jobs that they are not happy with. I was lucky that I did not have to.

Adam provided a historical perspective on the current work environment:

> For some people it takes so much longer to figure out what is their place. … In the old days you did not question it as much. You would stay with an unhappy job. People want more from life. People's expectations are higher …. What I am trying to say, is that the idea got out, that there is a big world out there, a lot of fun things to do, interesting things to see. [This] goes against the idea of being satisfied with a great life but a limited life. People know there is more out there, and they want to experience it.
>
> People are being perfectly rational about it. If you are a woman, are you going to be so quick as soon as you get out there, are your expectations so low, to be married and have kids? That used to be normal. Society does not put that expectation before you anymore. Men got away with a lot more. In a more conservative culture, who wants to be an outsider? If you are in a city, in New York or Boston for example, to be single and 35 is not questioned. It is not strange. Society has become less oppressive. People are delaying putting down roots.

Adam suffers from occasional panic attacks, which he attributes to his entrepreneurial and risk-taking spirit:

> Sometimes I have slight panic attacks but nothing bad; the more you do it the better you get at it. I am easily bored. I need excitement. There are socially accepted ways of doing it. We are a spoiled crowd that wants more. I measure myself against people who are interesting and move society forward. I need to build something of value that someone is willing to pay for. If you want individual validation that you are doing something worthwhile, if someone is willing to pay for it that is a good indication. And then you will do well for your employees, and the market is served doing something that someone wants, and hopefully you will make a few bucks.

His reference to delaying settling led to a discussion about relationships. Adam is not currently in a relationship, and has had limited success sustaining one long-term. His work life is "like a roller coaster…with dizzying highs and lows, and occasionally there is a calm stretch." In contrast, he views his romantic life as "neglected, it's been neglected." With respect to his personal life, Adam states:

> I am single, unfortunately. Eventually, yes I would like to be married. I wouldn't say tomorrow. When you have had employees, sometimes it doesn't work out, [and it has… [m]ade me very careful entering into agreements with people. You don't want to jump into anything that is difficult to undo; you have to do your homework; you have to be careful; there are a lot of steps. …You have to minimize your risk because the downside is so bad. You have to have the patience to follow the right steps. You got to find the right person, you got to have the right priorities. It will not happen by chance. [It is] painful to fire someone. You have to have your eyes wide open; it's foolish if you don't. And it's risky, it's so much more risk than you want.

I was struck by how Adam spoke of his potential significant relationship. It felt as though he was describing a business transaction, a dispassionate account of his accumulated experiences, using a business model to inform his decisions about

choosing a romantic partner and making a long-term commitment. Although Adam alludes to boundaries, he seems to have difficulties applying his knowledge to his life:

> When you are in the middle of one of these start-up experiences it consumes every minute, if you let it. Always racing against the clock, because there is an infinite amount of things that you need to do. Personally, you have to have boundaries.

There appears to be no boundaries between Adam's work life and personal life. For example, the 15 employees of his first company were his primary source of social interaction. Interestingly, Adam uses his current business partner, as well as his previous business partners, as major sources of support. His relationships with his partners seem to provide him with emotional sustenance and emotional balance. "When there are problems you really internalize. That is why you need a business partner, because they will be feeling up when you are feeling down."

Adam understands the need for balance, the need for complementarity in his life. I wondered if and how Adam was going to make it happen in his personal life. He had found a rhythm, albeit a nontraditional one, and a sense of fulfillment. He expressed a sense of unease about his personal life, but at the same time communicated that this area of "neglect" would receive attention at some point in the future. Adam, describing his work life, conveyed a sense of mastery and confidence, never questioning that he is the navigator of his ship.

Maria

Unlike Adam, Maria chose a career prematurely and regrets not having sufficiently experimented with alternatives. These days, she has come to terms with her career choice and derives satisfaction from the process of teaching. She hopes to open doors to adolescents who like herself may not have the support or expertise to fulfill their dreams.

While Adam is single, without children, Maria is a 30-year-old single parent, trying to navigate a career, raise two children, and maintain a vibrant network of friends. She immigrated to this country from Spain at the age of 8. Her father passed away when she was 5 years old, an event that mobilized her mother to pursue a better life for her two children, as "there was very little opportunity for education." Maria did exceptionally well in school, and has been teaching for the past eight years. She is presently seeking a second master's degree so that she can function as a high school guidance counselor, in part to help others like herself take advantage of the educational and career opportunities they might otherwise miss. She discusses her goals and hopes, "I hope to be a guidance counselor. I really value education and I see it as an equalizer, and I hope to inspire students from that high school [referring to the high school she attended] to go to college."

Maria reflects on her career choice with some regret. Although she enjoys the process of teaching, she regrets not having sufficiently explored and experimented with alternative careers post-college. Maria selected a career prematurely, without considering the myriad options available to her:

> I would have never studied business. … I think I should have majored in something like cultural anthropology. I really liked learning about cultures, their histories. … I never before found a major that incorporates all the things I wanted.

She attributes her inability to find a suitable major as a foreclosure of opportunity. Maria has been able to satisfy her need for exploration and experimentation via travel. She enjoys immersing herself in other cultures and learning from those experiences. During her college years, as well as in her early 20s, Maria traveled a fair amount, supporting her travel via part-time work.

In speaking about her personal life, Maria assumes a more questioning and confused stance. While she is able to have satisfying long-term relationships with female friends, her intimate relationships with men have left her disappointed and frustrated:

> When I was in college, I never wanted to be in a relationship, never saw myself married. I dated a lot. I wanted to do well in school. Not in my plans. I knew I wanted to be married eventually. [But], I did not want any part of it in college. I wanted to study, date, and travel. A lot of my friends wanted a relationship. [But], I did not see men as that great. My mother told me you have to be perfect, to be clean, to be a virgin, to be the perfect girl, so that a man will want me.

Maria, in describing her relationships with men post-college, describes relationships with controlling and/or duplicitous men that are either primarily motivated by physical attraction, or those that are devoid of it, and that ultimately lead to disappointment and sadness.

Maria's first serious long-term relationship was tempestuous, one in which she was physically abused. She immediately ended the relationship, after seeing "a side of him [she] did not see before, an indication of what [her] life was going to become." However, she was pregnant and did not consider abortion an option, in large partly due to her religious beliefs. Maria continued to assume a social life, juggling her multiple roles: mother, working woman, daughter, sister, and friend. With respect to dating, she tried a different track, deliberately choosing to date men that were not physically attractive to her:

> I went on dates; no one I was physically attracted to. A lot of successful men, [I was] not physically attracted to them. Let me try a guy I am not attracted to. Maybe an attraction will come. Before, I was dating guys that there was a physical attraction, and those ended pretty terribly.

Her second serious long-term relationship was guided primarily by this desire to form a relationship that was not exclusively organized by physical attraction. Maria became pregnant, and although she and her male partner tried to make

it work, lack of passion on her part was a significant barrier. Maria is currently resolved to living her life without a male partner and raising two children, with both fathers assuming some responsibility for the emotional and financial well-being of their respective children. Although Maria yearns to find her soul mate, she takes a fatalistic stance:

> I have given up on the idea of finding a husband. I leave it up to God. If it is meant for me to be married, I will. If not, I accept that. Maybe God put me on this earth to do other things and being married would interfere with that.

She reflects on her previous relationships, stating that although she would prefer to be married, she is not willing to be in a relationship where she has to "give up herself":

> I want to be married. I can't be a stay at home mom and that's it. He [the father of her second child] wants someone like his mom, who never worked. She did not work until he was 18. He needs someone like that.… I was trying to do my best, to be there for him, but I was not going to give up myself. He said there is something missing from the relationship. We don't have the same goals. If you are going to be married, that person needs to be perfect. If he needs someone to make him the center of her world, then I guess I am not that person. He should have who he wants. He should not have to make sacrifices like that. I want to be right for that person. He wants to feel that he is my everything too.

Maria expresses sadness in terms of her personal life. She wishes that her life had unfolded differently. However, she also takes pride in being an educated woman who was able to travel and see a larger world:

> I don't think I would have established a strong relationship in college. If I had gotten in a serious relationship, I would not have traveled, seen so much, learned so much. I do regret getting pregnant out of wedlock. I should have been responsible with sex and wasn't. I do love my children.

Her attitudes toward men and marital relationships are strikingly different from those of her Spanish mother. Maria seems to have incorporated an alternative model, one that strives toward autonomy and differentiation. She is struggling with the need to come to terms with disparate, seemingly incompatible models for being a woman in her current cultural context. This is closely related to the dilemmas faced by Sahasra and Lily, two women we will meet shortly, both of whom are challenged to construct a free-standing life in the shadow of parental values and expectations.

James

As difficult as it is to right oneself in a maelstrom of cultural change, basic economics can play a major role in postponing carefully nurtured dreams of achievement. James is a 28-year-old male who grew up living in a northeastern city with his father. After struggling with the divorce of his parents and the death of his younger brother at the age of 13, James began to look for more structure in his life. In this, he has been largely on his own: his father is emotionally somewhat distant, and his mother remarried, moved to another state, and keeps in touch by

phone only sporadically. James explained that since he was a young boy he had a passion for airplanes, and he knew that he wanted to be a pilot. He thought that a spot in the Air Force would provide him with the structure that he lacked in his life, and the opportunity to pursue his dreams. James received a college scholarship through the Air Force and embarked upon his piloting dreams immediately after finishing high school. He describes the first 2 years of his college experience as "rough" due to the physical demands of the ROTC program, and the difficult time he had transitioning to a new reality, that of being told what to do most of the time. James served for 4 years in the Air Force, acquiring many new skills, a profound sense of leadership, and a new language, Arabic.

Upon the completion of his fourth year of service, James and his girlfriend discovered that they were expecting a child. James recognized that he was at a critical juncture. Although he knew he was transitioning into adulthood, he also wondered about the future, and how it was going to unfold in terms of his new role as a father and provider. Not quite ready for marriage, or to embark upon the journey toward parenthood while continuing his search for potential career opportunities, James questions his capacity to successfully navigate these multiple demands. He worries that if he continues his career in the Air Force he will miss crucial moments in the life of his eagerly expected child. He concludes that it is in his and his new family's best interest to explore new career options.

As James ends one period of his life, he continues to sort out who he is during his transition into adulthood. He chose the Air Force program with the best long-term career prospects, but since starting his own family senses new obligations and priorities in his life, and is trying to find a local job that will allow him to remain close by. James still dreams that one day he can establish an aircraft safety business of his own. He questions how it is possible to be in his position, with a wealth of experience and work skills, and still be turned down for so many jobs. Confused by this unforeseen roadblock, he expresses disappointment and bewilderment about his job search experiences:

> It just doesn't make sense. …I'm happy about who I am and the decisions I have made, but at the same time I am frustrated with the job market. I put all of this effort and time into making something of myself in order to be independent and maybe one day support a family, and now that this milestone is about to be reached I can't find a job. Maybe I'm being naïve, but I still have a feeling that I will do just fine despite all of this discouragement.

Research by the Pew Foundation (2012) contextualizes both the frustration and the optimism James is experiencing. This 2011 survey, which included 808 individuals, ages 18–34, indicates that almost a quarter of participating emerging and young adults are working for free to gain experience so that they can compete for jobs in the current economy. One half of the participants surveyed explained that they took a job they did not want due to a sense of economic urgency, and 35 % reported returning to school to avoid the difficult job market in order to gain skills to better compete in the marketplace. Only 27 % stated that they had adequate employment (p. 4). Not surprisingly, the impact on their personal lives has been profound, with over 30 % postponing marriage or having children, and almost a quarter returning to live with their parents (p. 20). Yet 89 % of those who feel

dissatisfied with their employment remain confident that more satisfying employment and a more comfortable lifestyle lie ahead.

The path that James is charting is a winding one, filled with uncertainty, but at the same time, he remains hopeful and continues to strive for a more autonomous future. He is resilient, intrepid, and optimistic. Although he did not anticipate his current difficulties securing a job, he is not paralyzed by regret in terms of his choice to date. In addition to his fascination for planes and the aeronautics industry, a passion that continues to sustain him, James entered the Air Force for its structure. Naturally, the lack of structure inherent in a prolonged job search challenges his resources.

Sahasra

As her 25th birthday approaches, Sahasra is living in an apartment on the outskirts of Boston with two of her best friends from college, both of whom work nine to five jobs in the greater Boston area. Like her roommates, Sahasra moved home immediately after college and accepted a job she planned to keep for no more than 2 years. She accepted her position as an administrative assistant at a law firm after 3 months of unemployment and a challenging job search following graduation. Now that her two-year anniversary in that position has come and gone, Sahasra is starting to feel trapped in an unfulfilling job that pays barely enough for her to meet her rent and monthly student loan payments.

Sahasra's relationship with her parents was strained during her college years and continued to deteriorate once she moved into her own apartment. As first-generation immigrants from India, Sahasra's parents believe strongly that she should be living at home with them and her younger sister until she is ready to get married and start her own family. Sahasra was able to convince them of the advantages of living on campus as an undergraduate student so that she could be close to her classes and in an environment where everyone else was focused on academics, too. Her parents reluctantly allowed her to live in the dorms and supported her financially as much as they could during the 4 years she attended a private liberal arts college. The freedom that came with college life was exhilarating for Sahasra, who had been sheltered during high school. During her college years, she remained focused on academics and ballet; at first, ballet was the only extracurricular activity her parents found acceptable for a young woman. In college, Sahasra forged deep and lasting relationships, went to parties, ultimately played intramural sports, and did well enough academically to graduate *cum laude.*

Sahasra's decision to move back home after college was the result of financial stress and pressure from her parents who hoped her experimentation with living away from the family was over. During the year she lived at home, Sahasra constantly butted heads with her parents:

> It was terrible. These young guys from the Indian American community would arrive at the house, and the only reason they were there is because my parents approved of their family. I had to find a way to make it on my own. My mother was yelling and my father got very

quiet when I was moving out, and my brother was scared to help me move my things into the city, where I moved in with some friends who had had a roommate move out. I couldn't really afford it. Right now I'm wondering if I did the right thing. I like being Indian and being identified with that way of life, at least some aspects of it. It's who I am, anyway, whether I like it or not. Being on your own is hard and not always all that much fun.

The novelty of the independence she gained in college has worn off, and Sahasra is starting to doubt whether it is worth it to scrape by, paycheck to paycheck, in a job she finds unfulfilling just so that she can live outside of her parents' home. She eventually wants to get married and have children, and wonders if perhaps she should have given some of the men her parents set her up with a chance.

Sahasra feels as though she is at a crossroads, but she is unsure of how to proceed. She wants her life to have meaning, and to integrate various aspects of her background and heritage into a cohesive self-identity. At times this task feels overwhelming, and she wonders whether she is really ready to be considered an adult at all. Pausing at the edge of another cultural divide, Lily, a 27-year-old, White, gay, and a college graduate with a B.A. in anthropology wonders if new adventures will force her hand and help shape her destiny.

Lily

Lily's story captures the ambivalence of an intelligent, emerging young adult engaged in the dual task of resisting career foreclosure and trying to shelter aspects of her emerging identity from parental misunderstanding and disapproval. Her nonreligious, middle class, and compact nuclear family includes her parents and one sister. Lily works part time for a governmental agency. Right now, she lives with her parents.

Working to fulfill a one-year government contract, Lily works in a call center where she answers phones all day that are monitored on a tracking system. She describes herself as "tethered" to her desk and says she is "suffocating," dealing with many tough calls that include cussing, raised voices, and threats to her personal safety. With little recognition for good work, Lily's current work situation, though rewarding financially, is a struggle, self-described as "hammering away."

Lily considers the four unsatisfactory jobs she has had, and the high number of jobs her colleagues and friends have held, attributable to financial pressures, unclear objectives, and the hardships of finding a job, even with the requisite postsecondary education. It seems to Lily that everyone in their 20s is suffering from the current economic climate, and it does not appear to be getting any easier for those individuals who are just entering the workforce. Lily also believes that her peers are motivated to trade the goals of earlier generations, security and high pay, for job fulfillment, while acknowledging that this luxury must be paid for by a longer tenure in parental households and significant student loan debt.

Lily describes her own work trajectory as "the path of least resistance." She was employed first by Wal-Mart, left there to waitress, and then left that job for a more

stable and financially secure office job. She chose this current job to test herself to see if she would enjoy the environment. She has discovered that on the whole she does not thrive here though, she reports, there are "days where you love it."

In response to the charge that individuals in their 20s are self-absorbed and narcissistic, Lily says:

> …totally fair and let's face it, we are. We all want a job we enjoy; we've been taught we can do whatever we want and to accomplish our dreams. We're taught we can have it all; better education, plus a job we love. At the same time, when we actually got out there, everything changed. Everything tightened up. It wasn't what we expected.

Lily wryly suggests that the people making these judgments need to look at who raised them this way. She also admits that most individuals in their 20s are a bit behind with respect to established developmental markers like finding a career and "settling" into relationships. Still, she holds that the markers themselves need to be revised, and many observers agree with her. Degree inflation has now made post-secondary education and its debt burden an unquestioned necessity (Baum et al. 2013). Armed with a college degree, emerging adults must weigh the hardships of obtaining any job at all against the faint hope that the impending retirement of the Baby Boomers will provide opportunities in the existing job market, while at the same time acknowledging that the aging generation is postponing retirement due to the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermaths (Munnell et al. 2006).

Lily explains why emerging adults are taking their time when making decisions to "settle" for a job or relationship:

> You reach 25 and you're well educated, willing to work, but have absolutely no idea what area of work you want to be in. You have no idea what path you should be on or what decision is the correct one to make.

Pressure and feelings of anxiety stem from lack of direction, according to Lily, and as a result she feels a sense of loss about "being 25 or 30 and realizing you're nowhere near where you thought you'd be or where society expects you to be, comparing yourself to those who have their lives together." She describes the current scenario as "a tiny little mental nightmare you repeatedly put yourself through, not being where you thought you should be, or knowing what you ought to know."

In addition to internal pressures, there are overwhelming pressures from society at large, peers, and in Lily's case, her parents. They have no quarrel with their daughter's present line of work, given how displeased they were when Lily assumed the job of waitress shortly after completing her B.A. She and her parents share views on how to conduct yourself in work relationships, and agree on the importance of professionalism, exceeding expectations, and being responsible for yourself and your actions. Lily acknowledges that her parents were financially supportive and provided sufficient general, day-to-day support while growing up.

But, there are deep sources of discomfort related to her sexual orientation. "They have no idea about most of who I am," says Lily. As we will see in the following chapter on identity formation, Lily is completing her own emergence into adulthood by indirection, through a process that may, in due course, lead her to

the same vantage point afforded by a more direct approach. Lily names several coping strategies for these challenges that have not resolved, among them "mini vacations" indulged in on weekends, admittedly, she says, not always a financially savvy choice. Hesitantly, she admits to using alcohol as a coping strategy, especially for "unwinding" and "de-stressing" after a day at the office. She says she is not abusing alcohol, but definitely uses it more than she did in her prior jobs. Lily realizes that this coping strategy is not her best option, but notes that finding effective and healthy coping strategies has always been challenging for her.

Lily's latest tactical maneuver is to obtain a work visa to Australia and leave the country for a year. She describes this as an itch she must scratch. She is leaving her secure job to go spend a year working as a server, she says, to get this out of her system before she settles down. Arnett (2006) speaks of many emerging adults taking advantage of a life relatively free of commitments and traveling to a place they would like to live, experiencing things that may be denied them in the future, and reaping the rewards of being self-focused individuals. Lily's parents are perplexed by her choice, and question why she would leave her current stable job for a lower paying one in Australia for a year. They wonder whether she is trying to escape the responsibilities of adulthood.

"Tomorrow is a mystery and yesterday is history," Lily laughs, when asked about her future. She does, however, expect to be settled in a career, hopefully in law enforcement, and be financially stable within the next ten years. She also hopes to be in a happy and healthy committed relationship, spending time with her current best friend and family. She foresees her relationships—whatever their present limitations—continuing long into the future. Travelling and enjoying life to the fullest is what she wants.

Conclusions

Adam, Maria, James, Sahasra, and Lily present a window to the diversity of voices of individuals who describe their attempts to transition to young adulthood in a context in which legal, social, and economic authority, in comparison to previous generations, occurs in a delayed fashion. The following chapters will explore our current understanding of identity development, examine cultural considerations and their significance, and follow with analysis and discussion of the interviews conducted with emerging and young adults, parents, and employers. These rich and diverse narratives capture the complexity and nuance of this developmental period.

I will conclude the present chapter with an additional perspective—a reflection on how we measure adulthood today—in the form of a letter I received recently from a former student. It reveals the concept of a fluid, gradually attained adulthood prevalent among emerging and young adults today:

Dr. Konstam, you asked us at the beginning of your course to think about when we felt we had become an adult. I am still thinking about that question. A part of me wants to acknowledge all the hard work, responsibility, focus, and depth I have experienced so far

as a woman at 34 years of age. There are times I feel wise. I recognize my two greatest indicators of growth and maturity are (1) I listen better and (2) I am slowly becoming more composed, less fired-up about the senselessness and pain in this world.

The latter does not mean I care less, it simply means that I have come to recognize that feeling angry about a situation does not help to solve it. Do you see my qualifiers however, in both my statements: *better, more, less, slowly*? It doesn't sound like I'm there yet. Am I an adult at 34? It seems silly to say that I'm not. But then there's the hopeless romantic in me that believes in nurturing the inner-child, admires the fearless leader who says, "I'm not sure," and wants to be the 90-year-old grandmother who still makes dandelion necklaces.

I think perhaps I am only now evolving into adulthood. Is it coincidence that I became a mother this year? Does it have anything to do with beginning my career path in school counseling; one I have felt right about for several years now? Or are there many more who feel like I do; perhaps an indication that the emerging adulthood category should be extended from 18–29 to 35?

It's certainly evident … that my peers are marrying later, starting families later, and are frequently in the process of career changes. Does that mean official adulthood might really start at 40? Or as Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We never *are*, we are always in the state of *becoming*."

When I was 20, I wrote down several warning signs of becoming a boring, overly serious, unimaginative adult. I'm now 34. Where do I stand with regards to this sophomoric list?

- **Settling down**. Well, I have been with my soul-mate, Ivan, for 11 years now. We have just started our family and have our first baby boy, Ari. That sounds pretty settled to me, and you know what, I love it. I think the fact Ivan and I met in Katmandu and have since taught in Washington D.C., Cartagena, Colombia, Guatemala City, and now Kuala Lumpur adds a unique side to the typical family progression.
- **Owning a house**. We haven't done that yet. We only stay in a new place for about three years. My dad, however, has been pressuring us for years now to "invest in bricks and mortar." I think my dad would have a hard time describing Ivan and me as responsible adults since we don't own property.
- **Sitting through board meetings**. I was referring to the typical corporate life of making tons of money, working for "the man," and contributing little to the welfare of the planet. I still have a cynical outlook on that career path; an outlook that doesn't gel with that of my dad who recently retired from a large international corporation. I am happy to report I have been a teacher for 11 years and that keeps me young at heart and feeling that I am contributing positively to this world.
- **Becoming a soccer mom**. Okay, there's nothing wrong with being a soccer mom. I love the sport and hope our son Ari plays in the future. I was only referring to being boxed into stereotypical female roles. I wasn't going to stand for it. I keep fighting those stereotypes today and am one of the few female soccer *coaches* I have come across in my path so far.
- **Saving for my retirement**. Ever since I started combining money with Ivan we have been saving for our retirement. My dad approves of the savings but feels without being a part of one particular school board we are missing out on the benefits teachers get when they work for 30 years in one district. He worries about our financial situation and has started saving for Ari because he doesn't think we'll have enough for his turn at university.

So I'm doing pretty well with my list. I seem to have reached adult status without becoming too uninteresting. However, I have to weigh that against my father's opinion that I don't act enough like an adult. Oh well, I'll leave that analysis for a future paper in my Abnormal Psychology class!

As you have probably surmised, simplistic depictions of this generation of emerging adults are foolhardy. The new generation of emerging and young adults defies easy characterizations. To dismiss them as immature and self-focused does not acknowledge the realities, costs, and benefits associated with becoming an adult in the twenty-first century. Financially, for example, it is more difficult than ever to strike out on one's own. A minimum-wage or entry level job simply does not cover the expenses of independent living anymore, especially when one is repaying massive student loans.

Perhaps there is a need to be a little more self-reflective before passing judgment or trying to shoehorn emerging and young adults into careers and lifestyles more typical of a previous generation. They have seen many of the mistakes their Boomer parents have made and are not eager to repeat them. Their Boomer parents, typically born between 1946 and 1964, share the experience of living in Post-World War II America in relative wealth compared to previous generations, and have been described as having access to a wide range of government services, including housing and education (Taylor and The Pew Research Center 2014). Emerging and young adults grew up in a world in which half of all marriages ended in divorce. They have watched their Boomer generation parents give their allegiance to 60- or 70-hour-a-week jobs, only to be "downsized" and marched from their corporate offices. They have seen our planet's resources diminish frighteningly as a consumer culture preached material success as the main criterion of a life well-lived. They don't want to repeat the mistakes of their parents' Boomer generation; they want to do better. The following chapters provide an opportunity to actively listen to a wide array of emerging and young adults, parents, and employers—the major "stakeholders"—as they speak about this developmental period.

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Chapter 2
Identity

The development of an identity is the first and most formidable task of entering and negotiating adulthood. Emerging and young adults in a postindustrial society such as the United States face a global environment that is linked in cyberspace, increasingly complex, demanding, and constantly changing. The future is uncertain, and for some, replete with choices and possibilities. Rules are less clear and more contextual, and there is less institutional guidance pointing to clear developmental pathways. The current context demands from this group greater maneuverability, flexibility, and adaptability (Savickas 1997; Porfeli and Savickas 2012).

Emerging and young adults are well aware that they are living in a different environmental context compared to past generations. Boomer generation adults, positioned in the past to offer them tangible and emotional support, may no longer be able to help, bewildered as they are by the same circumstances. Due to lack of institutional supports and parental expertise regarding how to best navigate these new contingencies, a key question, "…who am I, and where am I going?" feels overwhelming to many emerging and young adults, particularly given an environment that leaves it up to the individual to figure it all out (Cote 2000, p. 127).

Identity development takes place in a historical and cultural frame of reference. For example, whereas symptoms identified with hysteria were manifested in Victorian times under conditions of emotional repression, identity issues now seem paramount. Today, the limitless representations of self and career for emerging and young adults immeasurably complicates the task of developing a coherent identity. Although the diagnosis of borderline personality disorder is controversial and sex-role linked, it is currently one of the most popular diagnoses in psychiatry, an umbrella term that covers a multitude of symptoms, all pointing to individuals who are emotionally needy, scattered, and who present an uncertain self (Cote 2000). The diagnosis is symptomatic of our fluid, ever-changing context, a context that challenges the abilities of the individual to internalize a coherent self (Sue et al. 1998).

Although the task of navigating who one is has always been complex, the age in which we live in has made it harder. Cote (2000) takes the position that given the lack of adequate structure and support, "people tend to be confused or lose their sense of place in society" (p 136). Abundance of choice is "problematic" and emerging adults struggle individually. Cote asserts: "in late modern society … an increasing number of people seem to become 'adults' (in terms of age) who are 'immature' in comparison to adults of earlier periods. This all seems 'normal' now" (p. 136).

Many emerging adults sense that the times they live in give them leeway to judge themselves by a different standard from prior generations, if only to make their quest more bearable, and especially if the construct of identity itself is undergoing a transformation. There has long been a rich literature on identity development that addresses the period just prior to our focus, that of adolescence. Identity development is neither immutable nor stable; it is primarily dependent on external contingencies and prone to change (Lipford et al. 2005; Zunker 2006). It is a multidimensional construct, characterized by shifts in the sense of self. We know that identity may vary over time and across settings (McCarn and Fassinger 1996; Tanner 2006). Moreover, changes in identity do not necessarily represent a switching of fundamental values, but are responses to expectations and constraints of particular environments (Hays 2008). Individuals find themselves needing time to reroute paths and reconfigure meanings when chaos and loss emerge from the unknown.

Josselson (1996) provides a cogent discussion of identity, and reinforces the notion that we are responsive to our environment, and capable of assuming a self that is nuanced, organized, and informed by environmental expectations and contingencies:

> We are not the same in all regions of our lives, and how we make meaning may change across situations or over time. Identity is what integrates our own diversity, gives meaning to the disparate parts of ourselves, and relates them to one another. Identity is how we interpret parts of ourselves, and relate them to one another. Identity is how we interpret our own existence and understand who we are in our world. (p. 30)

Marcia (1966) identified four identity groups based on the theoretical underpinnings of Erikson (1956): Foreclosures, Identity Achievements, Moratoriums, and Identity Diffusions. In order to make these four groups "more descriptive" and "less evaluative," Josselson (1996) changed the names of these four groups to Guardians, Pathmakers, Searchers, and Drifters, respectively (p. 275). Although Josselson's findings are based on research with female participants, she concludes that extensive research with both males and females, over close to 30 years, reveals that these four groups can be reliably assessed and "share predictable personality characteristics and ways of behaving" (p. 36).

Guardians tend to execute a life plan that they mapped out in their childhood, or were mapped out by their parents. They are the carriers of culture, revealing the highest level of obedience to authority, respect for rules, and the lowest levels of anxiety when compared to the other three groups (Josselson 1996). They embrace tradition as they navigate their lives and their lived experience reflects the belief: "This is how I am because it's how I was raised, or how I've always been" (p. 35).

Pathmakers prefer action to looking inward. They love to explore, but not without coming to a resolution. On arrival at an identity, their commitment has to be congruent with values they have already acquired, and "make identity commitments on their own terms" (p. 35). They struggle with options, and then make their choices, although they decide with less conviction than Guardians. Their lived experience reflects the belief: "I've tried out some things, and this is what makes most sense for me" (p. 35).

Searchers engage in exploration, but are in a period of struggle, unclear about how to execute perceived available choices. Their lived experience reflects, "I'm not sure about who I am or want to be, but I'm trying to figure it out" (p. 35). Most Searchers choose only after an extended period of self-examination and experimentation and remain aware of their internal conflict and struggle.

Drifters are most delayed in structuring their identity. Wary of committing themselves, their choices can be capricious. Drifters have difficulties discerning their desires and dreams, and these desires and dreams are ever shifting. They struggle to extract a sense of self from their own chaos, but often are in the position of being an actor in someone else's plan (p. 241). Their lived experience reflects postponement: "I don't know what I will do or believe, but it doesn't matter too much right now" (p. 36). Their struggle is most often a solitary effort, characterized by a paucity of support from others. Searchers and Drifters can be easily understood in the context of a society in which the appearance of multitude of paths forward may as easily dissolve into a mirage.

It is important to note that the identified four identity groups are not fixed, and may shift over time; they are not etched in stone. Given the complexity and nuance of lived experience, many can be seen as fitting into more than one category, with significant overlap. The categories as presented are on a continuum without fixed boundaries. While some individuals may remain in one group, others may enter and exit the identified categories over time (Waterman 1999). Critics such as Belsky (2010) have pointed to the reality that individuals may identify with one group in one area (i.e., interpersonal relationships), but in another domain may identify with another (i.e., career choice, religiosity). In other words, placing people in a single group, especially given the negative value judgments surrounding the categories of Drifter and Guardian, do not augment the usefulness of the model (Kroger 2000).

It is also important to recognize the instability that is characteristic of this developmental period (Montgomery 2005; Shulman et al. 2005). For example, according to the Office for National Statistics, 3.3 million, 20 to 34-year-old lived with their parents in 2013. Since 1996, the number of emerging and young adults, 20- to 34-year old, living at home increased by 25 %. The age group most likely to live with their parents were those in their early 20s (49 %), (a percentage that rose from 42 % in 2008), followed by 25- to 29-year-old (21 %), and for 34-year-old the number of young adults living at home decreased significantly (8 %). There is extensive variability with respect to individual trajectories. Participants ranging in age from 17 to 27 reported alternating periods of increasing and decreasing dependency, in large part due to financial constraints linked to the economic context.

Identity and Group Membership

Group identity informs the process of identity formation (Phinney 2006). While meaningful discussion of identity needs to recognize the influences of race, gender, social class, ethnicity, religious orientation, sexual orientation, and disability and how they intersect, the literature is evolving and advances in the past decade have been made (Schwartz et al. 2005, 2013; Syed et al. 2013). bell hooks (as cited by Phan et al. 2005, p. 310) discusses models of identity development and notes that they have not sufficiently incorporated cultural influences and have understated the effects of discrimination and oppression on identity development.

In homogenous contexts, group identity exploration may not express itself as a primary concern (Phinney 2006). In more heterogeneous and global contexts, individuals are increasingly likely to explore issues related to group identity and the negotiation of self in relation to other groups. This is particularly true if they have encountered stigma and discrimination, realities that block access to resources, and to personal and political power. Temperamental style, personality characteristics, level of education, phenotype, and the degree of group discrimination individuals have encountered are variables identified by Phinney as important in determining how likely and the degree to which individuals will explore issues related to group identity:

> With regard to ethnic identity, some people feel a strong need to belong to a group; they may seek out people who share their ethnic background and obtain information about their ethnic heritage as a way of developing a place to belong. Others feel less need to belong or else fulfill the need within a different context, such as family or friends. Experiences of being treated stereotypically or discriminated against, or being asked to label oneself ethnically, can be strong motivators of exploration, regardless of the larger context. (p. 130)

Harrison (1995) provides further clarity in terms of understanding the relationship between identity development and cultural group memberships. All individuals seek an identity, "a specific individuated personhood" (p. 379). Identity includes an "idiosyncratic constellation of qualities in each of us that persists over time," and is context dependent, and "multifaceted" (p. 379). Among individuals belonging to marginalized communities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer men and women), exposure to stigmatization, prejudice, guilt, and shame are likely to lead to the incorporation, integration, and expression of these indignities. A response to these experiences provides opportunities for an identity to develop in opposition to bigotry and resentment (p. 379). Moreover, it is important to recognize the intersection and interrelationships of cultural group memberships such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, particularly among individuals with "multiple oppressive identities" (Constantine 2002, p. 211).

While it is critical to acknowledge the significance of cultural influences and the isms associated with these influences (i.e., racism, sexism), it is also important not to overgeneralize, stereotype, and confine one group of individuals to a

specific limiting narrative. For example, hooks (1996), states that in order "to understand the complexity of African American girlhood we need more work that documents that reality in all its variations and diversity. …There is no one story of African American girlhood" (p. 13). Above all, we need to see and incorporate the other as he/she is located in idiosyncratic cultural contexts, and pull together these dynamic meaning systems. Responding to projections by others, a Black female emerging adult expresses it this way: "everyone sees what they want to see. But no one seems to want to see me" (Williams 2005, p. 279). Encountering the other includes seeing and experiencing the other, and embracing the complexities, the contradictions, and the nuances.

Agency and Identity

Schwartz et al. (2005) investigated the relationship between agency and identity across three American ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics). They evaluated differences in identity indices between clusters of participants organized according to patterns of agenetic personality scores. The results revealed few ethnic mean differences in the indices of agency and identity. Agency is related to exploration, varying degrees of commitment and choice, but it is not related to closure and conformity. Predictably, agency is negatively related to avoidant and aimless behavior. The authors conclude:

> These results support the cross-ethnic generalizability of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity as well as that of neo-Eriksonian identity theories proposed by Berzonsky (1989), Cote and Levine (2002) and Marcia (1966). More specifically, this finding supports (Cote's 2000; Cote and Levine 2002) contention that agenetic functioning is an important component of individualized identity development and, hence of effective adaptation to postindustrial societies, in emerging adulthood. (p. 222)
> What appears to be key is [one's] ability to capitalize on the relatively unstructured and unguided task of forming an identity in contemporary American society (p. 222).

Across all three groups, emerging adults who evidenced commitment to a set of goals, values, and beliefs were able to cope with and "counteract" the pernicious effects of lack of structural supports (Schwartz et al. 2005, p. 223). In other words, these commitments served as protective buffers that enabled successful transitioning to adulthood. It is important to note that the conclusions are based on a sample of private high school students. The results are context specific and generalization to other high school settings such as public schools or to older emerging and young adults would be problematic.

Schwartz et al. (2005) state that although the range of alternatives available to emerging adults (e.g., career paths, romantic attachments, and worldviews) has expanded, the support that society as a whole used to provide for identity formulation is evaporating. Accordingly, if emerging and young adults are to make enduring life commitments (e.g., romantic commitments, career choices), they must first undertake the psychological tasks of individually forming a stable and viable

identity that can guide and sustain these commitments, particularly given the replacement of community-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles by market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Emerging and young adults, high in self-efficacy, who proactively negotiate the formation of identity are more likely to negotiate for social resources and position (Schwartz et al. 2005).

In summary, individuals have many discrete selves and the search for a solitary purpose or unidimensional identity is foolhardy. However, there appears to be idiosyncratic qualities in each of us that persist over time. There are many narratives, many stories that represent who we are, and growth is a process of "rewriting, revising, and interweaving these narratives" (Josselson 1996, p. 256). If a life lived mostly in the ideologically contested and economically expansive twentieth century did not challenge the concept of a unidimensional identity enough, one seeking to define himself/herself at the beginning of the twenty-first century encounters significant complexity unimaginable only a generation before.

Technology, a pervasive crucible of identity formation, will continue to furnish the toolbox of emerging and young adults—and those younger— with the means to access realms of experience otherwise closed to them, or simply to clone versions of their emerging identities and let them loose in cyberspace. The actor Franco (2013) notes that manipulated and multiform "avatars" of the self, or "selfies," instantly communicate any aspect of identity that comes into focus in the moment. Above all, according to Franco, they elicit attention and attention is power. This implies that when it comes to representations of the self, sheer presence is more important than content, or consistency. The placement of images everyone can see need no longer be determined by events, talents, and capacities; rather it can be a by-product of the identity formation process itself.

Disseminating these versions of self is an interactive process. Instant peer global feedback might come in the form of a post, an invitation to chat, or to "like" the image, each with unpredictable effects on the development of identity. Notions of the image, formulated after the fact as the number of images exploded in consumer culture generations ago, are not new to the conversation. What is continually expanding are the number and variety of technological venues where possible selves can be developed, honed, and given a trial run. Chapter 4 will explore the confluence of identity formation and technology in greater depth.

A Diversity of Paths: Emily, Ryan, Tracey, Sergio, and Lily

Emerging and young adults compose their lives in myriad ways, in part reflecting their perceived freedom and the lack of clearly demarcated social norms (Tanner 2006; Schwartz et al. 2013). As suggested by Arnett (2006), absence of strict codes of behaviors creates a context in which emerging and young adults feel freer to explore and expand their search for identity:

Social control and social norms set boundaries for what is acceptable and punish behavior that is outside the boundaries. When the boundaries are broad, as they are in emerging adulthood, a wider range of individual differences is allowed expression, on the basis of a wide range of individual tendencies and preferences (see Arnett 1995). …Because of their freedom from social control and the lack of social norms for the 20s, emerging adulthood is the most volitional period of life, the time when people are most likely to be free to follow their own interests and desires, and those interests and desires lead them in an exceptionally wide range of directions. (p. 15)

The context described by Arnett creates an environment for exploration of possibilities. Emily, Ryan, Tracey, and Sergio personify the multifaceted, subtle, and diverse ways emerging and young adults are negotiating the dynamic process of developing an identity. Sergio provides a context for understanding the immigration process and how it intersects with identity development.

Emily

Emily is a 31-year-old, single female, with a degree in environmental science. Her 20s have been a collection of adventures: she has sailed around the world twice, working on ships that allow her to make use of her training and expertise as a research scientist. She has pursued time-limited projects, typically on boats that have taken her to a range of work sites, including the Galapagos Islands, Hawaii, and Alaska. Emily's sense of self is informed by a lifelong commitment to learning and exploration. She has spent 2 years working as a lecturer on a recreational boat, as well as 2 years teaching English in a more formal context to students in Japan.

Emily speaks to the importance of friendships and family and how she creates family given her peripatetic existence:

> My sister and I are exact opposites. She and I are the ying and yang of the family. My sister sees family as not being important to me. [That is not the case]. I am able to create family where I go. I consider the friendships I make, family members, whereas for my sister, immediate family is her focus. She does not have friends outside of family. Friendship is much more important to me. My friends' families embraced me as a kid. [Once I started working], I never come home for Thanksgiving. I have kept that tradition of spending time with other people's families, depending on where my friends are, and where I am in the world. What I have had for the past years are incredible experiences, but I need money to survive. I don't need a lot.

Emily thrives on work opportunities that provide for growth, adventure, and freedom. Satisfying her intellect, immersing herself in scenarios where she is forced to adapt, learn, and grow is consistent with her view of herself:

> I have so much freedom. My work life is what I make it. The positions I hold have vague outlines for my responsibilities. So for example, on the boat, I was required to teach four 45-minute classes a day. But the atmosphere encourages you to do whatever you want based on your interests. So I was giving environmental lectures. I did a series. I coached a basketball team, taught kickboxing, letter-writing workshops. I worked 12 h a day, [and I was] only required to teach for four hours.

Personal freedom is a value that Emily cherishes. Her parents married in their early 20s and raised a family soon thereafter. Although satisfied, they conveyed to Emily a sense of regret for not having had the time and money to travel and pursue their respective interests. Emily's mother was incapacitated with a back injury during most of Emily's adolescence, positioning her as the major caretaker of the family. Perhaps Emily's need to explore and interact with a global world, embrace difference and diversity, is related to her adolescence, given that she was confined by her premature role of caretaker for a family of five. Personal freedom is a key to Emily's view of herself: "knowing that I can do anything, having the freedom, knowing that I can do anything anywhere, and to do it alone as well, is important."

Emily thrives in the environment she has chosen for herself. She is emotionally and intellectually drawn to growth-enhancing experiences. Adversity is framed by Emily as a learning opportunity, and overcoming adversity is core to Emily's sense of self:

> If I am not happy, I immediately come up with a list to figure out what it is that I need to do to make me happier. For example, the work I did in Galapagos, I was working with all Spanish speakers. That was quite hard on me to camp on a desert island with people I could not communicate with very well. But it was really up to me. I really studied and made an effort to communicate, and at the end, I had made lifelong friendships. At the end, I was able to understand, understand Spanish I should say. The fact that there is a challenge, where I have to do something, that I can learn as a person and grow, that draws me.

Family and friendships are critical to Emily's view of herself, but she manages these important domains in a nontraditional way. When asked how she would rate herself in terms of overall personal satisfaction (on a scale from one to ten, ten indicating maximal satisfaction, she rates herself as close to ten):

> The downside, I make these really close friends for a short period of time, for three to four months, and then we go our own separate ways. I keep in touch with people I meet through e-mail and visit them again and again. However it would be nice to stay long enough to keep those friendships for more than a few months.

When asked about friendships and how she sustains them in the long term, Emily states:

> Some dwindle, some don't. There will be 10–20 people [on a project that I will connect with]. We will get along and feel really close. When we part, we all write to each other. After a year, four or five friends stay in the circle, and after five years, I might keep in touch with one or two of the most important people. My group of friends is the one or two of the groups that I have had. [However], if I knocked at the door [referring to the original circle of friends], I am sure they would let me in, but I don't keep in touch with them on a regular basis. My connections are sporadic. I might write for a week every day and then not for three weeks. My closest friends would hear from me once a month at least.

When asked how she would rewrite the story of her personal life, Emily says:

> There are a couple of guys I would not have dated (laughs). Other than that, I wish I had more time. I wish that I spent more time just hanging out with friends. At times, I get very focused on my projects and I should socialize more and work less.

Emily does not have a clear sense of what her future holds. When asked how she envisions her life ten years from now, she states:

> I'm not so good at envisioning the future. I could be doing the same thing I am doing now, or I could be inspired and go back to school and get a Ph.D. and be in a profession. It could go anywhere. I don't think I would have guessed what would have happened from graduation to now. I never guess the future. I will still be in connection with many of my friends and make new ones.

With respect to intimate relationships, Emily has not constructed a distinct vision, though she thinks there is a good possibility that she will raise a child as a single parent. Her intimate relationships have changed based on these revised expectations:

> I think I exhibit a lot of the same behaviors time after time. The biggest change, in my earlier 20s, I knew I could date people and neither one of us would be serious. And then as I get older, I still may not be serious, it seems like relationships seem to have more purpose. I don't like going into a relationship knowing that someone is looking for a wife. It puts unnecessary pressure on it. So I think my behavior is more cautious now, whereas before I would say sure for a date or two [when asked to go out], now I would not bother so much unless I was really interested.

Emily has chosen a less traditional path, one that is informed by her need for exploration, growth experiences, and a connection to a larger global world. Ryan, in contrast, has chosen a path that earlier generations would find more familiar, laying a foundation that includes consistency in his multiple roles.

Ryan

Ryan is a 26-year-old married scientist, who has a clear sense of where he is and where he wants to be professionally and personally. His love of tinkering with computers as a child ("inventing"), as well as his respect for the creative process, has blossomed into a career as a research scientist. He has channeled this love of inventing to his current job, whereby he is involved with other researchers in executing and testing new inventions for the marketplace. Ryan has been married for 2 years. His wife, an accountant, has a clearly articulated life plan, a plan that Ryan jokingly states, "was conceived in the womb."

Currently, Ryan is relatively happy in his career, as well as in his home life. He continues to grow professionally, entertaining the possibility of starting his own business. Economic concerns are in the forefront for Ryan. He has accrued significant debt from his undergraduate and graduate degrees. Although he and his wife generate a substantial combined income, he does not foresee home ownership before having children, a shared goal. His future includes assuming most of the financial responsibility for his wife and family. He hopes to have two children by age 35. Ryan also mentions the possibility of having to help support his two parents when they retire.

Ryan is relatively satisfied in his professional and personal life (on a scale of 1–10, Ryan rates his overall satisfaction professionally and personally an 8.5). His life is comparatively regimented and routinized, and he wishes that he had more time for leisure. Given the couple's significant work demands, weekends are filled with errands and responsibilities. Ryan laments that he does not have sufficient time to "hang out" with his college friends and misses those associations. Although he plans on reconnecting with them at some time in the future, he has not done so to date. He thinks about the future in a larger context, and is concerned about what he perceives as pressing social issues:

> I wonder if we are going to be the generation that will have to grapple with the world's biggest problems- global warming, transportation, social security. There are a lot of issues we will have to grapple with. My generation is self-centered for a reason. We never felt that the institutions were there for us. Long-term jobs and pensions are not there. Social security is going to disappear. You know what? I have to take care of myself. I feel screwed in my 20s. The Baby Boomers, their gain is my loss.

Ryan states the above in a matter of fact way, belying the possibility of anger toward his parents' generation, the Baby Boomers, for being irresponsible and leaving his generation with escalating problems that should have been addressed. While feeling burdened, he also has faith in his generation, reaffirming their competence, creativity, and energy.

Tracey

Tracey is a 33-year-old Black, married, female, with a 1-year-old son, and second child on the way. After graduating from an elite college, Tracey took a series of low-paying jobs (secretary, receptionist) that barely paid her bills. Her expectations were "pretty low," and at the time, she was not thinking about "personal or career development:"

> I really had a hard time in college… I did not have expectations of what my future would be like. I did not have a vision. I could not see a future. And I think it was easy to not think about it. My parents were not saying come home and figure yourself out. There was an attitude of there's time, you are young, and you need to figure things out.

At age 26, triggered by a turning point in a relationship, Tracey broke the cycle of low-paying jobs that held little personal satisfaction with the help of a therapist. She confronted a dysfunctional relationship in which she was physically abused. Tracey had been living with a heroin-addicted man, Ben, for 2 years, who was stealing money from her to maintain his habit. Previous attempts by Tracey to leave him, escalated to Ben attempting suicide and promising to change, which in turn left her clinging to possibilities and hope for the relationship. She sent him "back on a plane to his mother," during a violent episode, when she realized that she would not be able to "rescue him and that she needed to rescue herself."

The loss of her therapist to cancer also sparked a crisis for Tracey and mobilized her toward action. She remarks, "I didn't know what to do with myself.

I didn't have much direction. You don't know how much time you have to do something and I always had an interest in government."

Tracey returned to her "roots," setting up an apartment with her sister, entered graduate school in the field of government, and took a job at an insurance company to support herself. She sought therapy with a Black therapist who helped her come to terms with herself as a woman of color. With help from her therapist, she explored feelings of alienation and not belonging while growing up in a relatively privileged neighborhood, feelings that were replicated in her elite college experience. Tracey summarizes her experience in therapy as helping her to understand and accept herself in context. She was able to reflect on her experience of being marginalized and struggled with "the complex interplay of racist, sexist, classist…oppression" she had experienced (Williams 2005, p. 282). It was the first time Tracey began to think about a career versus a job: "Prior to graduate school, my expectations were pretty low. I would make enough money to support myself, would not be too bored, but I was not thinking about career development, professional development, or personal development."

Tracey completed her degree in government, and decided to enroll in a Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology, while working to support herself. She successfully completed her doctorate in Counseling Psychology as well as a clinical postdoctoral internship. Her clinical experiences suggested that she had not found an optimal fit with respect to her career choice. Tracey worked in a clinical setting that included crisis management, a demanding on-call schedule that left her feeling overwhelmed, overscheduled, and emotionally depleted.

At age 29, Tracey met a very supportive, nurturing man, whom she married a year later. She currently has a 1-year-old child, and one on the way. She describes her husband as kind, stable, and committed to family. Tracey is struggling with her choice to stay at home and mother her soon to be two children. She fluctuates between assuming a reassuring stance, and, at more vulnerable moments, a more anxious one that focuses on her identity as a professional woman:

> It will work out. I have always worked it out before, and the path will become clear when the time is right, that is my healthy zen side speaking to me. Learning to trust that the world will be okay, that there will be enough for me. [I am] trying to live what I believe. It comes out of years of trying to live an authentic life, figuring out what I value, what I hold dear, and trying to live that…I hope there are a lot of paths available. At my worst, my anxiety gets very high. No one will hire you. You will have to work at McDonalds, although there is nothing wrong with honest labor. I will become this mindless person. [I] will be boring. [I] will be living my life through my children. I fear how I will make this all work, knowing that I am a control freak. I like to plan…I worry. What is the professional impact of my taking 5–6 years out from the work force? [It is] really scary to not have my hands on my wheel. How do you define yourself? How do you keep yourself from just being a mom and how do you deal with other people's views of who you are? No one will speak to me at cocktail parties when they find out I am a mom. People assume that you are not interesting, that you do not need intellectual stimulation.

Right now, Tracey is trying to lead an authentic life, one that does not compromise her sense of herself, trying to instill a sense of accountability in her children.

Her self-esteem appears to be variable in an environmental context that does not appreciate the choices that she has made, most recently to take time out and stay at home and raise her soon-to-be two children:

> I am coming out of years of trying to live an authentic life, figuring out what I value, what I hold dear and trying to live that. How do I help my son grow up to be who he is, help him explore his gifts, his passions, his interests? How do I help him develop competence and self esteem as opposed to an inflated self esteem? There is an 'I am an okay lovable person, and I am enough,' as opposed to a self esteem that is not grounded in reality. How do I help him connect with himself and other people? How do I help him have authentic connections, to help him know who he is and what he is offering?

Understanding Tracey's struggles requires an understanding of the importance of cultural context and the complex interplay of racism and sexism (Williams 2005). The questions she rhetorically asks regarding her son seem to apply not only to her struggles, as they are embedded in a larger cultural context. Tracey continues her search for an identity that includes a nonmarginalized view of herself as an authentic Black professional woman, wife, and mother who is "seen," occupying a place in the world that is recognized, her quest acknowledged.

Sergio

The immigration process, leaving one country to resettle in another country, presents interesting challenges for the emerging and young adult. The individual is in transition, adapting to the "new" cultural values and experiences, while simultaneously holding on to the "old." The immigrant not only experiences the instability and uncertainty associated with his/her immigrant status, but is also likely to experience flux associated with this developmental period (Walsh et al. 2005). Sergio, a 26-year-old immigrant from Bulgaria, exemplifies the intersection of these two processes.

Sergio arrived from Bulgaria as an adolescent, attended college in the United States, and is studying for a graduate degree in business administration. He alludes to a self that was shaped in part by a communist regime. Immigrating to this country has afforded Sergio an opportunity to revisit and revise his worldviews. He provides a poignant metaphor that speaks to this process:

> The image I get is that of a bird a canary that has been in captivity, that someone has caught it and kept it in a cage. And now the canary has gotten freedom, and it is now experiencing life as it should have been. I would say the door has always been open, but the bird has always been scared. My own personal self-imposed cage.

Sergio draws a picture of "captivity." Over this, he interposes an additional layer of complexity, suggesting that, in a bid for autonomy, he places "self-imposed" limits on his freedom in addition to the limits of freedom imposed by a communist regime.

Sergio describes his social context in Bulgaria. He alludes to different norms regarding dating expectations within an atmosphere of secrecy. In addition, he speaks of himself as a shy, awkward adolescent:

> [I]would have liked to have had some sort of a love interest in high school. And then of course, I would have liked that I was more sociable. I would hang out with people and go to the parties we had. I would have liked to be less shy. I went to high school in my country…It was during the time a communist regime was still around. You could not have a love interest; you could not be public with it. It was not something that was expected. People would have other people that they would like, but nobody would know about it. You would not tell your parents, because the expectation was, [that] you would reach a certain age and then you would get married. High school age was not considered the age to be seeing other people. We were closed to the rest of the world. You would not see movies, [as] boyfriend girl friend [out in the open]. Don't ask don't tell. It helped communism by subduing people, not allowing them to do what they liked.

Sergio has appropriated many of the more freewheeling developmental markers that prevail in his adopted country. He hopes to have a career in place by his early 30s. He also hopes to experience "three to four long-term relationships," and to be married by the age of 35. He states that had he not immigrated to the United States, he would be committed to a career in Bulgaria, and most probably be married. Sergio has not had a long-term relationship, in part due to his shyness, in part due to the freedom he perceives with respect to what he deems as culturally and developmentally appropriate. He recently met a woman on the Internet, a relationship he hopes will continue to develop and thrive.

Sergio is availing himself of choices and opportunities in terms of his career. He has had several jobs, none of which have been an adequate fit. Sergio gets bored easily, and does not appreciate repetitive, serial tasks. He states, "after working someplace for some time, I get bored. Trying different things is what I really, really like, and seeing what I like." In describing himself vis-a-vis work, he depicts an image of himself as a bee:

> A bee going from flower to flower and having the nectar from different flowers. I am taking a sample of different flowers, in a sampling mode, trying different things, and that is why I have that image of a bee. I think it has been a really good thing for me. The nectar would be the skills - software skills, people skills where you interact with different kinds of people.

He recognizes that there are consequences to experimentation:

> You don't get the feeling of being settled till much much later in life. Always feeling you could do something better. There is always more out there to try. That is a feeling of being uneasy, not being happy with your life, one of the consequences. There is more different types of jobs that are available. A lot more opportunity, a lot more choice. And since there is so much choice, people feel they can move if they don't like particular positions.

Sergio speaks of premature foreclosure, closing off consideration of options:

> When I started college, I made the mistake of deciding what I want to do and focusing on that only. When I finished school, the whole dot com just fell and I could not find a job, and so I had to try different things. Had I been more careful, had a broader view of things, I could have taken different kinds of classes and I think that would have helped me.

Given that Sergio experienced a Communist regime as a child and adolescent, choice and experimentation are particularly salient for him:

> It comes down to choice. If there was not so much choice, people would go with what they have. I would equal it with someone entering a store, buy whatever, being swamped with everything they can buy. If they had three or four choices they would just get done with it. Because they are looking at all these different things they are spending time looking at all these choices, rather than going in and getting out.
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> On a personal level, people get the feeling I have tried all these different things in the end I chose what is closest to my own personality. On a broader level, [it is] probably affecting our society, with people not deciding early enough on relationships or work. [I am getting philosophical]. If they will not marry till late 30s early 40s, they will have fewer kids, will make our society older. [There is]a bit of a down side, they're not getting married till their 30s, not having more than one kid or no kids, won't be as many kids around. The society begins to lose its edge. Kids bring in the new things. A lot of innovation is done for the young people or by people. They see the future. Innovation suffers. Society begins to get older. Loses its edge. The hope is by people trying different things, deciding what they really like, it will make us a lot happier in our life, more adjusted in our society.

In summary, choice and freedom are paramount issues for Sergio, a function in part of his experience of "growing up" in an eastern European country. Sergio provides an intricate narrative, but one that is incomplete. He is continuing to revisit and revise his sense of self, informed by diverse sociocultural political experiences.

Lily, Revisited

Given the multiplicity of paths forward, and the lack of a reliable map that would inform the choice of one route over another, it is not surprising that many emerging and young adults pause at the first step. This is where we left Lily, an emerging adult we met in Chap. 1, whose career development narrative has emphasized a recurrent theme in most of the case studies, the future as a trackless land. But Lily's nascent identity must be formed in a different vacuum, the vacuum in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) identities can recognize one another but remain limited in number, marginal in the larger cultural context. "In total, the power and pervasiveness of heteronormativity in predominant social institutions, discourse, and facets of public life presents an image of proper adult citizenship that discourages deviation from its standards" (Torkelson 2012, p. 136).

This is not to say that the visibility and legal status of gay and lesbian people in the United States, Australia, and Western Europe has not undergone rapid transformation in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The legal challenge to overturn bans on same sex marriage has been successful in many parts of the United States. But just as the election of a mixed race U.S. Chief Executive in 2008 did not resolve all the sequelae of centuries of racial discrimination, the apparent, ongoing success of a legal struggle directly involving only a portion of

the GLBT community has not in itself transformed the cultural context in which developmental paths are chosen. Despite the growing visibility of lesbian and gay married couples and families in communities all over America and Western Europe, heteronormativity remains the dominant discourse of Western societies (Torkelson 2012).

Emerging and young adults who identify as a sexual minority confront the same transitional barriers as their heterosexual counterparts, but they do so in a cultural context that does not mirror their sense of selves, nor offer a range of possible futures and selves. Traditional themes of domesticity and coupling pervade popular media (Torkelson 2012). Schools support adherence to heterosexual gender role standards, including mode of dress; although schools teach sexual education, they do not tend to focus on nonheterosexual pairings.

Seeking adventure as an antidote to foreclosure and premature stagnation, Lily is going head to head with her parents about her decision to spend a year in Australia. On its face, this adventure postpones not only career decisions, but diverts the energy required for another task, the task of disclosure: she has yet to come out to either parent about her sexuality. Neither of Lily's parents met—in any context—the woman with whom Lily is presently in a relationship.

Emerging adulthood is usually the first time that individuals disclose their sexual identity, both to themselves and to others (Needham and Austin 2010). Though this task is partially completed, Lily is fully aware that her sexuality will be a constant struggle for her, her secret an insurmountable barrier in terms of her relationship with her parents that will take years to address. To her, coming out unfolds over a lifetime, mirroring Orne's conclusion that "The concept of strategic outness defies notions of an end point to the coming out process" (Orne 2011, p. 688). Lily, to date, is "out" when and where she has chosen, and may yet inform her parents of her lesbian identity from a safer vantage point.

Researchers such as Croteau et al. (2008) are proposing minority sexual identity models that acknowledge the nonlinearity of the developmental experience, and are inclusive of a variety of minority sexual identities. The Dual Trajectory Lesbian and Gay identity model proposes four phases flexible enough to accommodate progressions in identity development such as Lily's, inclusive of "circular progressions, re-cycling, and location in multiple phases simultaneously" along each of these trajectories. First among them are:

a. awareness of difference,
b. exploration of affection and desire, and the awareness of LBGTQ categories,
c. a deepening of commitment, which entails identification with the group and the notion of making same-sex choices going forward,
d. and the process of synthesis or internalization, which involves inclusion of one's sexual minority identity into social contexts. (p. 197)

As cited in Croteau et al. (2008), this is an inclusive model that has the capacity to account for a variety of possible contexts in which an individual integrates his or her sense of self. According to this multiphasic and nonconsecutive model, Lily

stands on the verge of the internalization and synthesis phase. Elements of earlier phases combine with this as a marker of where Lily currently finds herself.

Lily, recalling the past, is not surprised that this work is still undone, believing that if her parents were more emotionally supportive, she would have had a much better life. She recalls a period of social anxiety and full-blown panic attacks when she did not feel that her parents were "there for her," remembering her father's, "Just get over it." Instead of attempting to work things through, they simply wrote checks for her therapy and, in Lily's retelling, ignored the issue. Then again, the choice to remain at home and retain that security may have exacted a cost, contributing to the general feeling of impasse as well. In this light, Lily's gambit to leave the country can be seen not so much as an evasion, or even a postponement, but the end of a search for a very large transitional psychological space to position herself for her next move.

In the meantime, Lily has found other ways to get her needs met, happily reporting close relationships with her sister and a best friend. She describes them both as "family." She came out to both of them just recently, and their positive reactions exceeded her expectations. She still wishes she had come to terms with her sexuality a lot sooner; she could have lived her life as she wanted in her early 20s, she reports. When asked to choose a metaphor to describe her life, Lily says, "life is a puzzle." The pieces of the puzzle are coming together—not the haphazard scramble it was before—yet it is still far from being complete. "I am working on becoming more honest about who I am, and who I want to become," she says.

Researchers developing the literature on GLBTQ identity formation would not be surprised that Lily reframes her developmental task as a solitary, intrapsychic struggle within the family context, without much reference to the greater world. Nealy (2008) explains that "from early on LGBT persons are surrounded by immense loss—growing up without visible role models and without connections to queer history and queer culture, growing up not even knowing that they have a history and a culture" (p. 290). All that is at stake here, evidently, is her "honesty"; the entire struggle to establish her own identity is one she has conceived of as a test of her own personal integrity. In this context, it is no wonder that Lily feels that she requires an entirely new and vast continent in which to prepare for the task.

Lily may choose to commit and even marry her present lover, or marry another woman, congruent with the more compliant norms receiving the most attention in the present cultural landscape. Alternatively, she may choose a less conventional course of serial commitment, identification with a family or community, or combine elements of each of these possibilities. She may come out to her parents or proceed as she has, measuring what its worth to her against the feeling that the ship has already sailed, the opportunity for a meaningful exchange on the subject already passed. Either way, in a time of growing acceptance and acknowledgment of a normative subset of LGBT individuals, it is more crucial than ever to explore the diversity of sexual minority identity, mindful that there are multiple pathways to its formation (Croteau et al. 2008; Torkelson 2012).

Conclusions

The lives of Emily, Ryan, Tracey, Sergio, and Lily exemplify the diversity of experiences related to identity formation, and the range of paths taken professionally and personally. Whereas Ryan is following a path consistent with Guardians and Pathmakers, as identified by Marcia (1966), Tracey appears to be least differentiated with respect to her career path, but more directed and differentiated in her personal life. Emily and Sergio know what they are interested in, and are in the process of connecting those interests with a career path, one more traditional, the other less so. Both remain unattached, although Sergio identifies a path he would like to follow in terms of his emotional and social life, while Emily wonders how she might forge a new one.

In sum, identity development is an ongoing process, multifaceted and informed by environmental expectations and contingencies. It is a process that involves "chang[ing]" and "stay[ing] the same" (Josselson 1996, p. 256). Thus, identity is:

> The backbone of a life story provides unity to a life as lived by choosing versions of one's history that 'fit' often editing out what is incongruent. The past is reconfigured to make our present identity seem inevitable-or if not inevitable, at least meaningful. … In retelling our lives, the past also absorbs aspects of the larger culture's narratives (so that we all feel like products of our times). (p. 256)
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> …Some [individuals] live a single story; others live many… these stories intermingle and influence one another." …[The] plot … is seldom linear. …Identity encompasses all these selves, forming a narrative that weaves them together. (p. 257)

Interviews with emerging and young adult participants illustrated the diversity of experiences related to identity formation, and the range of paths taken professionally and personally. The following chapter focuses on culture and class and how it informs the narratives of these emerging and young adults.

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Chapter 3
Culture: Opening Paths, Creating Detours

Coming to grips with culture and its influence is central for many emerging and young adults in the process of identity exploration. Cultures can collide and repel, or merge and integrate, resulting in adaptive hybrid cultures that may be challenged, reconfigured, or rejected. The developmental period of emerging adulthood is a time when many individuals begin to feel culture's presence, when it makes its expectations explicit. Its celebrations and challenges are a feature of this developmental stage (Hardin et al. 2001; Santrock 2010).

Emerging and young adults are provided with opportunity for identity exploration in the arenas of love and work. Eventually, a consolidation of identity explorations occurs in multiple contexts and may occur more or less, all at once (Schulenberg et al. 2004). The confluence of these dual streams, the developmental and the cultural, can lead to conflict or fusion, opening out or narrowing the boundaries of this developmental period. In turn, individuals live in more than one context at a time. The multiple contexts in which an individual resides determines in part the developmental course of that individual (Arnett 2000, 2011; Bronfenbrenner 1993). Given this dynamic interaction, a discussion of cultural factors necessarily enables us to have a nuanced and more complete understanding of this period. It follows that their exclusion inevitably leads us to a flattened and constricted perspective (Konstam 2007).

Definitions of culture are bountiful (Hays 2008). Culture cannot be reduced to a single dimension such as ethnicity, gender, or race. Rather, culture is:

> A broad-based concept comprising a host of interrelated dimensions that include, but are not limited to, race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation. …It is the intricate interaction between and among these dimensions as well as how each informs the others, that ultimately shapes how an individual defines oneself. These dimensions also have a profound impact on the relationship(s) that one person develops with another. (Hardy and Laszloffy 2002, p. 569)

Culture is not a fixed or static process. Thus, an individual can simultaneously assume roles that are divergent (i.e., a White upper class male who is also gay). In

addition, an individual who identifies with a specific culture, may not identify with all of its features.

Phinney and Baldelomar (2011) suggest that although cultures can be identified by patterns of interactions, values, and mores, they are not "monolithic" (p. 165). For example, characterization of a culture as exclusively "individualistic" or "collectivistic" does not capture the subtle dynamics of the family and community. In working with emerging and young adults across cultures, it is important to understand the interplay between their individual characteristics and the cultural contexts that nurture and challenge them. Overgeneralization can lead to missed opportunities for empathic connection and places the relationship at greater risk for misunderstanding and rupture.

When considering the development of the self, emerging and young adult participants consistently identified social class as a prominent dimension. That is not to say that other significant variables such as gender and race were not relevant to this discussion. Rather, analysis of results revealed that individuals attributed significance to the dimension of social class and its impact with respect to informing the direction and navigation of paths taken at this developmental juncture.

This chapter will first address how culture influences the selection of the criteria that denotes adulthood, focusing on mandated religious and military experiences and filial piety. Using case illustrations, a discussion of social class and emerging and young adulthood will follow.

Criteria for Entering Adulthood: A Cultural Lens

Cultural values determine when and how individuals assume adult responsibilities, and thereby inform the duration and nature of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000, 2011). Disparate cultures align and diverge on these values in interesting ways. For example, in Israel the capacity to withstand pressure was rated as required for achieving adulthood status, a congruent with political realities (Mayseless and Scharf 2003). Facio and Micocci (2003) report that emerging adults in Argentina emphasize the capacities of the family to provide stability "in a way the world of work does not," a finding consistent with the economic upheavals occurring in Argentina at the time of the study (p. 92). For Chinese emerging adults, having control of one's emotions was considered a criterion for entry to adulthood (Nelson et al. 2004). None of the above criteria were rated as necessary for entering adulthood by American emerging adults (Arnett 1998).

In general, what defines adulthood for Americans are processes rather than discrete events. These include accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. One previously noted marker of cultural change is that in America, marriage is no longer viewed as a

definitive marker of passage into adulthood, in comparison to more traditional cultures (Arnett 1998, 2011; Kefalas et al. 2011).

An interesting evolution has occurred with respect to the decision to marry in the United States; the median age for women and men entering marriage in the United States on average is 26 and 28, respectively (U.S. Bureau of the Census data, 2009, as cited by Arnett 2011). In contrast, during the 1960s the median age for women and men was 20 and 22 respectively. The decision to marry is informed by a multitude of factors, some of which are culturally determined. Kefalas et al. (2011) examined the nexus of geographic locale and culture, especially the rural versus urban divide, and how it informs onset of marriage among diverse emerging adults.

Kefalas and colleagues identify two marital approaches, the "marriage naturalist" and the "marriage planner" to explain normative shifts that have occurred with respect to marriage onset. Marriage naturalists tend to reside in rural areas where social and economic conditions are more similar to the mid-twentieth century; and where marriage is viewed as a natural progression in the life cycle (Kefalas et al. 2011). Marriage naturalists, in other words, follow a more traditional path, and are likely to marry earlier than marriage planners. Marriage planners, in contrast, tend to reside in urban areas where individuals are more likely to be influenced by social and economic factors that result in marital delay:

> Because it takes longer for workers to move into full-time employment and establish independent households, young people coming of age in metropolitan areas find it difficult to meet two of the most important preconditions for a formal conjugal union: a separate household and a well-paying job.
> [In turn]…*marriage planners* use cohabitation, nonmarital childbearing, and premarital sexual/romantic relationships as placeholders—and not marriage substitutes—during the emerging adulthood … so that they can pursue other "adult" goals (such as completing a degree, establishing themselves in work, and creating a sense of emotional and psychological maturity). (Kefalas et al. 2011, p. 847)

The sequence of the two correlated developmental markers, marriage and adulthood, are reversed for these two populations: while naturalists view marriage as a prerequisite to adulthood, planners must first establish themselves as adults, and only then consider marriage (p. 871). It is clear that the cultural matrix reflecting economic and social structural conditions, inform the development of these two perspectives.

To better understand emerging adults who identify with more than one cultural heritage, Arnett (2003) compares three ethnic-minority groups in the United States as they define key features of emerging adulthood: African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Minority groups, in comparison to "White" Americans, endorse both individualistic and collectivistic notions of obligations toward others, incorporating views of the majority culture as well as views of their respective ethnic-minority cultures. For example, while the three minority groups each endorsed individualistic criteria such as accepting responsibility for one's actions, they were relatively more likely than the majority culture to recognize obligations to others (e.g., become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others).

These results suggest the fusion of multiple perspectives, a textured and inclusive response to cultural collision. Schwartz et al. (2011, 2014) posits that acculturation is a dynamic intergroup process between migrant individuals and the societies that receive them. Social psychological forces inform the particularities by which migrant individuals acculturate across a diversity of receiving contexts.

Religion and Mandated Rites of Passage

Religious culture informs the engagement of the individual with faith through a series of stages that mirror developmental stages (Fowler 1995). As in other areas, emerging adulthood is similarly a period of transition; over the course of one's college years, commitment to religious beliefs tends to decline in the United States (Barry and Nelson 2005; Barry and Abo-Zena 2014). Beaudoin (1998) proposes that emerging adults in America tend to be more "suspect" of religious institutions, and value personal spiritual experiences. Emerging and young adults in Europe and America tend to follow independent identity pathways that invite broad exploration of their religiosity, and commit to a religious identity, if ever, at the end of this process (Phinney and Baldelomar 2011). Beaudoin (1998) likewise reports that emerging adults in America view religious institutions with suspicion, and are likely to privilege their personal experiences over institutionally mediated ones.

Hervieu-Leger (1993, p. 141), argues that emerging adults use religions as "symbolic toolboxes," picking and choosing in accordance with their beliefs and values. Barry and Nelson (2005) state that "emerging adulthood may best be characterized as a time during which young people: (a) question the beliefs in which they were raised, (b) place greater emphasis on individual spiritually than affiliation with a religious institution, and (c) pick and choose the aspects of religion that suit them best" (p. 246). In due course, then, it follows that those emerging adults, reluctant to accept religious dogma, attach greater importance to thinking critically about spiritual issues (Arnett and Jensen 2002).

In Utah, Mormon religious rites of passage, provide meaning and purpose and inform adulthood status. The Mormon religion has an embedded structure that requires codes of behavior (i.e., attending temple, serving a mission between the ages of 18 and 27, adhering to Law of Chastity, abstaining from alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, and caring for others including family and church members). This structure, superimposed during emerging adulthood enforces continuous conformity with established beliefs and values to effectively truncate this developmental period, consequently much shorter in comparison to American majority culture.

While emerging adults in the U.S. are delaying marriage, the average age of marriage in Utah (70 % Mormons) is 23 for men and 21 for women. It is worth noting, though, that the average marriage age among Mormons in Utah, in comparison to the previous generation, shows a similar pattern of delay, indicating that

changes within the larger cultural context in the United States vie with local norms to influence marriage onset. Mormons, still, are taught to put family responsibilities first, to have as many children as they can afford to care for, and not to postpone having children for selfish reasons. At the Mormon university, 60 % of men and 45 % of women are married when they graduate (Jarvik 2002).

A university context can influence behavior either by reinforcing established cultural standards and beliefs, or by creating an environment in which students are more likely to explore their identity, including their religious beliefs, a finding supported by Barry and Nelson (2005): students attending a Catholic university "believe in God, practice their faith, and adhere to norms to a greater extent than public university students" (p. 253). Mormon students report advancement toward religious beliefs, rather than away from them, emphasize the importance of emotional control and tend to support greater interdependence, not autonomy. In contrast, individuals attending a public university subscribe to norms that indicate movement toward greater religious liberalism, autonomy, and complexity. These are the ways that religious culture, through the postsecondary institutions that they fund and administer, influences the duration and nature of emerging and young adulthood. It is important to note that the samples represented in the studies reported above are urban and middle-class, and do not represent the full range of societal sectors, especially rural ones. It may well be, as Arnett (2003) suggests, that cultural differences within countries are as great as or greater than differences between similar groups across countries.

Mandated Military Service

Shulman et al. (2005) conducted a study involving emerging adults in Israel, a country that mandates military service. Israeli society is described, on the one hand, as individualistic, consistent with other developed industrialized Western countries. At the same time, it is highly committed to family and communal values (Peres and Katz 1981). The variable developmental tasks associated with emerging adulthood in Israel speak to the complexity of this contemporary cultural context and its mixed and competing messages concerning individualism and communalism, and independence and dependence.

Emerging adults in Israel navigate a society steeped in mixed messages about social roles, behavioral responsibilities to self, other, family, and community. Findings by Shulman et al. (2005) revealed that a substantial number of Israeli emerging adults, like their Western counterparts, experience the period of emerging adulthood as a complex time, with periods of confusion and uncertainty. Mandated military service was found to promote enhanced maturity in the domains of personal responsibility, independent decision-making, and impulse control (Lieblich 1990; Mayseless 1994). Mandated military service, however, interfered with and postponed experimental behaviors, opposing them with an experience that is typically highly demanding, rigid, and authoritarian (Gal 1986).

Filial Piety

The teaching of Confucian doctrine among Chinese-Americans influences views of emerging and young adulthood. The Confucian teachings concerning filial piety support the belief that it is the responsibility of a mature adult to care for parents and family. This tradition includes both continuing to obey parents, and living close to them while they are alive. "As a culture, Chinese value caution, rather than adventure," and tend to value norm compliance with an emphasis on "obedience, conformity, and cooperation" (Nelson et al. 2004, p. 33). They endorse responses consistent with a collectivistic culture, including learning to have control of one's emotions, becoming less self-oriented, developing greater consideration for others, and demonstrating a commitment to others. Whereas 89 % of the Chinese American sample associated capability of supporting parents financially with adult status, only 16 % of White American emerging adults did so. Chinese Americans reported behaviors that indicated commitment to others, and tended to emphasize the needs and interests of the family and community (e.g., preparing to financially care for parents, avoiding behaviors that would bring dishonor to family).

Similarly, Chinese emerging adults (attending Beijing Normal University) are not as inclined as their American counterparts to spend the developmental period of their twenties in exploration. Nelson et al. (2004) suggest that structural considerations such as the inability to change schools, and not exclusively cultural ones, may explain the relatively incurious stance, and lack of exploration observed in Chinese emerging adults in this university setting. In keeping with the findings of Nelson et al., Schwartz et al. (2010) enrich the discussion by highlighting the importance of understanding the dynamic social psychological forces across a range of contexts in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of individuals in their respective settings.

Economic Context

Social and economic forces have changed the meaning of the transition to adulthood. Globalization has certainly informed the dialog. The complexities inherent in this changing economy have been described by our cohort as overwhelming and difficult to navigate. Nelson et al. (2004) echo their observations:

> That either the economy is not prepared for this generation, or this generation is not prepared for the economic terrain they must navigate. A mismatch between available jobs and the qualifications of those who are seeking employment became apparent. Indeed, poor parenting, inadequate education, and the paucity of settings in which adolescents are able to develop adult skills have serious repercussions during the transition to adulthood.

Moreover, minority groups and subpopulations face particularly daunting challenges that impede their advancement toward economic independence and stability. (p. 255)

Our findings suggest that many of the participants experienced an economic context similar to the one described by Nelson et al. (2004). Emerging and young adults with limited economic resources were particularly challenged.

Social Class

Social class membership is an important lens through which to view the experiences of the participants. Difference in social class emerged as a salient variable and informed the experiences of the two cohorts of emerging and young adults. Emerging and young adults in the less affluent cohort were more likely to encounter dilemmas that sprung from economic considerations. Economic constraints determined decisions and choices and at times served to limit access to opportunities for change, and limit the range of experimentation. It is important to acknowledge that excluding discussion of group membership with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class—not to mention their combined synergistic effects—constricts the narrative (Constantine 2002; Sue and Sue 2013). Nevertheless, the voices of the participants in this study identified social class as an important variable that shaped their experience.

Both groups found the terrain highly challenging as they encountered a set of environmental and economic circumstances captured in the following description by Mortimer and Larson (2002):

What is clear is that, across social strata, rapid social and institutional changes place a premium on youth's initiative, creativity, and ability to navigate a multidimensional labyrinth of choices and demands. For both rich and poor, the future puts greater responsibility onto their plate, requiring them to be volitional and agentic and … manage diverse components of fiscal, human, and social capital. (p. 14)

The interface of social class and the environmental and economic contexts described above limited the range of options available to emerging and young adults, particularly those with more limited economic resources. Eric and Jim are representative of the cohort with more limited resources; both speak of personal struggles that are informed in part by class. Eric assumes a philosophical stance, exhibiting an uncanny ability to view life predicaments from multiple perspectives, as if on a sea of calm. He is resolved to refit his original dream with one more limited in scope coming to terms with a dream that will not be realized, the pursuit of journalism, and full immersion in the creative process of writing. Jim, on the other hand, contains his anger, a silent volcano that may never erupt. One wonders about the emotional, physical, and social costs of assuming this stance as Jim tries to stay true to his values, provide for his family, and, to the best of his ability, uphold the "American dream."

Eric: "Parallel Ladders"

Eric is a 32-year-old Portuguese male, married for 2 years to a nurse, with a child on the way. He grew up in a divorced household, with some economic instability. His career path is characterized by a desire to continue the pursuit of his creative ambitions—writing feature stories for magazines and providing the photographs—with the reality of having to support himself and his family as a marketing consultant within a corporate, hierarchical, organizational structure. When asked to provide a metaphor that describes his career path, he responds, "parallel ladders": the first ladder refers to his current position as a marketing consultant, and the one adjacent, refers to growing his business as a photographer and writer.

Eric executed a circuitous path during college, supporting himself with a series of service-oriented jobs. He discovered his passion for writing in his fifth year of college and pursued a degree that enabled him to enter the journalism field. He graduated college in 7 years, a delay he attributes to the necessity of self-support and a lack of clearly formulated future goals. Upon graduating from college, Eric tried to pursue a career in journalism, but assessed that supporting himself would be a struggle. He found a job in editing which he did not like, and quit shortly thereafter, without an alternative. This decision propelled him toward a series of jobs he was not particularly well suited for, one of which included marketing. The marketing job provided Eric with security and benefits, and in turn led to his current job as a marketing consultant:

> I don't have the creative outlet I would like. I am not a big fan of corporate life. I don't like the bureaucracy and the politics involved. I am not saying it would not be anywhere. At some point, I would like to start my own business [in photography and writing]. I am currently working on getting there, starting my own business on the side. Photography and magazine writing, the two go hand in hand, and go back to my roots.

When asked if and how he would rewrite the story of his career, Eric replies:

> I would have starved more at college and accepted the fact [that in order] to start in a creative field you have to suffer more than in corporate life. [I would] more steadfastly stay on a creative career path rather than a corporate career path. I have no illusion that hindsight is 20/20. Not that I wanted to get rich quick. But basically I did not want to make any changes in my lifestyle. I targeted my job for the lifestyle I wanted, and now it is close to impossible given my domestic situation.
>
> I did what I did, but if I were to rewrite it, I suppose I would have taken lower paying positions that I was offered, and worked at that for a while so that I could get publishing credibility, build my resume in that field. At the time, to be honest, I just could not afford to live on what they paid me.

Eric expected to be a little bit further "ahead" at this point in his life, owning a house, and having a child. He states:

> I did not have a full vision for my personal and social life. I knew that as I approached my 30s, I would want a house and family, but I did not set my own personal goals [for] how to get there.

Eric expressed a sense of regret in not recognizing that he had more "space to make great leaps" than he knew. Given that he is married and going to be a father soon,

he feels that he is currently "guided by more conservative choices." Because of his decision to quit a job without alternative economic resources, and take a job that paid the bills, Eric assesses that he is limited by the choices he can make. He has more to "lose" in comparison to peers who are not married, do not have children, or have the economic flexibility to experiment and pursue their dreams:

> Less to lose can be a good thing or bad thing. I think my friends who are single, they can take big leaps. If they fall, they will be okay. They can pick themselves up. I felt that way before just a few years ago. I could almost say, people in my place, they don't make fewer choices, they make more conservative choices.

In offering advice to other emerging and young adults, he states, "as best you can, know when you have the space to make big leaps and know when you don't. When you are in your early 20s, it is hard to conceptualize."

Currently, Eric spends 100 % of his time doing work related to marketing, and 5 % growing his business. He hopes to turn that around, ultimately spending less than 50 % of his time working in marketing. He also envisions owning a small house with his wife and two children. With respect to his metaphor "parallel ladders" he is currently climbing both but hopes, eventually, to direct his focus and energies to one and realize his dream of having a business that fully supports him and his family.

Jim: The System Is Broken

Jim is a 30-year-old architect, married, with two children from a previous relationship. He is entrepreneurial, started his own solo practice as an architect, and could not make a go of it. As he states:

> I met a wonderful woman, decided I needed to be a grown up, make more money, and be able to get married and provide for my kids a lot better. I was getting by. I took the opportunity to work for someone else and make more money.

Currently he is working in an architectural firm, and is unhappy at work:

> Prior to meeting my wife, I made a lot of poor personal choices and as a result I have baggage from the mistakes I made in the past which provide irritants to my current personal life. I don't regret having two wonderful children. It was a dark time in my life. What made it dark is that I had committed myself to a relationship where we were totally incompatible. …because I failed in a previous relationship I did everything I could to make this person happy including sacrificing everything I was. I had become hollow, nothing left to me. I was a huge angry empty shell. The relationship took everything out of me and I did not know how to love any more.

Jim feels that he needs to quit his current position and start his own architectural firm, but cannot afford to do so. He expresses regret about losing track of his value system, which served as his anchor. Jim is trying to stay true to his values, but finds it difficult to live in a capitalistic enterprise that has gone "out of control."

Jim presents as a man guided by a moral compass who is trying to make the right choices for his wife and his two children. He hopes to be able to negotiate a new position in his firm that is a better cultural fit. Yet he feels constricted and

frustrated by his perceived options, buying into the American dream, but unable to actualize it. He is in considerable debt, stressed at home and at work, his choices constricted. He would like to start a business of his own, but his current financial commitments prevent him from taking the risk, despite the fact that he perceives himself to be well educated, hardworking, and committed.

Debt, Class, and the Emerging and Young Adult

The American dream is located in a rich history and grounded in the belief that freedom and opportunity are key ingredients. It is a dream ingrained in the American psyche. Although many emerging and young adults espouse it, many sense that external realities and pressures have come to undermine its viability.

An article that appeared in the *Village Voice* by Koerner (2004) discusses debt, one of the many influential external realities, among individuals in their twenties and early thirties:

> The average collegian in the U.S. isn't graduating into a world of boundless opportunity, but rather is $20,000-plus in the hole thanks to student loans and credit cards. So begins the snowball effect: The most desirable entry-level jobs often pay wages too low for the indebted, who must fork over a large percentage of their salaries to Sallie Mae or Citibank. Other posts are reserved for those who can afford to work unpaid internships, or whose parents can support them through an extra year or two of graduate studies. (para. 3)

Jim poignantly expresses the frustrations of trying to live the American dream. A first-generation college graduate, he feels stuck and unhappy in his current job setting, saddled with financial obligations in large part related to accrued debt. Jim's reality is one facing many emerging and young adults:

> I do not want to do a job because of money. …To get the job I want would put an unfortunate financial burden on my family. I would not be able to make it right now, and right now is when you need to pay the mortgage and car payments. …I love being an architect. I just don't like being an architect in this firm. I have to be an architect in a firm because of my commitments, if I'm to continue to be the husband and father I want to be.

According to Jim, the system is broken. He questions the pursuit of things deemed critical for our happiness, and is relatively sophisticated regarding marketing ploys that encourage acquisitive behavior. Jim views himself as having a value system, a "moral compass" that directs his actions. However:

> I think we are, simply because the demands society has put upon us in a position to seek work or stay at jobs with which we are dissatisfied [with]. We cannot survive financially unless we do. Capitalism—I do see it as an evil that is destroying our society. It is like the play Little Shop of Horrors, a story of a venus flytrap who grows from a little beautiful bud to a monster. I don't think we take care of anybody any more. …I make twice as much as my parents, we live month to month and that does not make sense to me. Capitalism is spilling out of control.

The statistics related to debt and the emerging and young adult raise concern (Kim et al. 2012). This generation of emerging and young adults is overwhelmed

by credit card debt and debt in general. White (2013) suggests that many will carry their debt over a lifetime, never having the experience of being debt-free. The accrual of significant debt cuts across SES, although disproportionately and more deeply among emerging and young adults with more limited economic resources. According to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, emerging adults on average graduated with $25,000 in loans in 2010 (Kim et al. 2012). Also, according to Sallie Mae (2009) those who have graduated college are carrying an average credit card balance of $3,173 (as cited by Kim et al. 2012).

For those emerging adults, 18–21 years of age who have not attended college, the future looks grim. More than half will have difficulty finding employment and even if they assume loans related to attending private trade schools, they may still be in the position of being unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011 as cited by Kim et al. 2012). The findings suggest that emerging and young adults from households with lower assets are at higher risk in terms of their debt obligations. Non-White students currently in college have higher student loan debt in comparison to White students. Limited parental resources negatively impacts credit card borrowing of those emerging adults who do not attend college. Clearly these statistics suggest that the patterns related to debt accrual among emerging and young adults are not sustainable. Koerner (2004) captures the current realities emerging adults are encountering.

> From the vantage point of the Kid and his millions of real-life contemporaries, one big answer is obvious: The system punishes the young who dare strive for something better. For those on the young side of 35, debt and its ripple effects have made upward mobility a fiction more often than not.
> …So the Kid pays his ambition tax in virtual silence, like that stereotypical sarariman putting in a 16-hour day with nary a complaint. Somewhere on the other side of the world, a Japanese youth preparing for his first trip to the U.S. may read the Kid's woeful tale and marvel, 'How tedious, how pointless, how restrictive, how dreadful.' He'd be right. (p. 4)

Both Eric and Jim express frustration related to career and personal trajectories imposed by economic constraints. Eric emphasizes the importance of knowing when to make "leaps." He speaks of missed opportunities to "leap" toward a more satisfying career trajectory and feels confined by his need to make more conservative choices, although at peace with the choices he has made to date. Jim also expresses frustration, feeling stuck in a job that keeps him paying off debt accrued while trying to establish himself professionally. The personal narratives of Eric and Jim poignantly reveal the import of social class and its influence on the developing self.

Conclusions

Consideration of cultural factors empowers us to adopt a more nuanced and complete understanding of this dynamic period. A review of the literature demonstrates the centrality of culture to the length and nature of this pivotal developmental period. Mandated religious obligations and military service served as examples for understanding the interface of prescribed mandates associated with a specific

cultural environment with emerging adulthood. Among these cultural mandates, filial piety informs the belief systems and behaviors of emerging adults around the globe, both in the countries that gave rise to these ancient ethical systems, and in those that nurture and challenge it with its own truths.

Analysis of results revealed that participants, particularly those in the less affluent cohort, attribute significance to social class as it informs the direction and navigation of paths taken. Hopes and aspirations were high for both groups, but economic constraints determined to a greater extent the choices of those emerging and young adults with fewer resources. They also tended to limit the experimental behaviors of emerging and young adults resulting in more "conservative" choices. In the following chapter, diverse voices ponder the influence of technology in their lives.

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Chapter 4
The Virtual Life Alongside: Technology and the Emerging and Young Adult

Technology, and more specifically, microprocessing—the capacity to accomplish with even smaller microchips which once required an entire room of computers—has transformed the day-to-day experience of all individuals, including emerging and young adults. With a basic Smartphone in hand, people all over the globe can call, text, and send images both still and moving to distant (or not so distant) others. Seemingly, solutions to our dilemmas can be invoked on demand, a Google search away, and the results promise empowerment. Receiving help from strangers, an everyday occurrence, reflects a new norm for solving a range of problems, both simple and complex. Consuming information from Internet "feeds" such as Huffpost, Buzzfeed, Digg, and Zite reflects a new norm, and print media and traditional television anxiously contemplate extinction—or absorption—into this new paradigm. The need for connection knows no bounds: on average, individuals unlock their phones to view texts, Facebook, Instagram, e-mail, etc., 100 times per day (Hu 2013).

Millennials are well aware that these changes set them apart from their Boomer parents. Twenty-six-year-old Tina, an enthusiastic emerging adult, says, "I'm proud I don't have a TV, I get everything I need online—movies, TV shows, music, games—I'm not stuck in one place with one device. I can access media anywhere." While these options can provide opportunities for greater control and access, they can also overwhelm us. An unspoken rule of conduct informing a wide range of interactions has been established: the parties involved in the exchange will respond to inquiries at a moment's notice, whenever possible, and will also reciprocate accordingly. A failure to do so may be received as intentional. The pressure to be connected 24/7 and ride the crest of the information flow can induce or exacerbate feelings of anxiety and loss of control. However, as Boyd (2014) suggests, the ability to be connected can also provide opportunities to take control and manage societal and personal pressures.

How does recent innovation in technology enhance, detract, and overall impact emerging and young adults and their relationships? This chapter explores two

platforms that have been embraced by emerging and young adults in large numbers: networking sites such as Facebook, and virtual games exemplified by World of Warcraft (WoW). It also examines the psychology of Internet addiction. First, a more general overview of technology and its impact on the way we communicate with one another.

Technology and Its Influence: Our "Best" and Our "Worst"

As with pervasive change of any kind, hourly forays into cyberspace are apt to engage creativity and compulsivity, aggression, and altruism. The anonymity and lack of accountability that prevail there allow for the acceleration and expansion of our best and our worst. In the pages that follow, we will try to gain insight into the human qualities evoked and amplified in cyberspace, and how emerging and young adults weave this seductive and intrusive change agent into the fabric of their lives.

What is known to date suggests that online surfaces are an excellent incubator for human aggression. Rationality cannot be counted on when individuals become "annoyed" in cyberspace. When annoyed, we can become easily frustrated and react in ways that are discrepant from the way we would like to view ourselves. Although we may think of ourselves as peaceful, in the context of anonymity and little or no accountability, our darker selves may emerge and fan out to become actors in our offline relationships. As cyberspace behavioral norms become solidified and internalized, civility seems to become rarer, and these new norms have unpredictable effects on the notion that the Internet would democratize civil discourse (Himelboim 2011).

This medium offers a modicum of control over images of ourselves, but no control over what others can say: the most widely used form of aggression is written aggression targeted toward or about another user. "Cyber bullying," "electronic bullying," or "online social cruelty," intends to cause harm. The medium, reporting on itself, demonstrates that it succeeds with pernicious regularity, especially among adolescents, in many ways the most psychically vulnerable to these attacks. Individuals of any age, however, can send anonymous or disguised e-mails and/or visual images with relative ease, minimal expenditure of energy, and with no accountability (Kowalski et al. 2008).

What resources can be called on to moderate these impulses? Reliance on unwritten behavioral norms and rules of conduct abide; people still know how to act in accordance with acceptable social standards and mores, and that offers some reassurance. Appeals to justice have spurred state legislatures to action: "cyberstalking" or "cyberharassment" are now subject to civil litigation (National Conference of State Legislatures 2013).

Awareness of just what it is about cyberspace that encourages individuals to fall short of offline ideals makes restraint possible, and perhaps even expands capacities in the other direction, toward kindness. Cyberspace seems to be a

bi-directional conduit when it comes to human agency: its anonymity encourages the aggressor, but also privileges the one who chooses to reveal. Mutual self-disclosure online has long been one of the salient features of online communication, resulting in totally unforeseen and new forms of intimacy for emerging and young adults. This sanctioned vulnerability clears the way for new forms of compassion and understanding, preparing the ground for altruism, mutual aid, and burgeoning forms of pro-social behavior (Klisanin 2011).

Organized forums become spontaneous therapeutic environments where emerging and young adults assist each other with hidden addictions or sexual preferences that they prefer to conceal in their offline lives. Online, nothing human is denied a forum, and there, emerging and young adults can be affirmed by their peers and find others to echo their thoughts and feelings, providing validation and resulting, perhaps, in a greater measure of self-acceptance (Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2008).

Such forums model new ways of being in the world, encouraging openness and intimacy in offline contexts with family and friends, and shoring up defenses for the socially isolated and besieged. At the same time, there are online forums that exist to encourage the maintenance and concealment of self-harming behaviors, and even rehearse behaviors that lead to suicide (Sueki 2013).

In sum, cyberspace, burgeoning with alternatives, has the capacity to immeasurably expand the offline worlds of emerging and young adults, inviting instant social engagement in ways that were unanticipated by prior generations. No one has to wait in cyberspace; with the click of a mouse, we can send the best and worst versions of ourselves tumbling into the consciousness of other human beings, for good and for ill. Millennials and their younger siblings face the task of shaping this force either as passive consumers, or as active innovators of free content. Much of what they do will stand on the shoulders of earlier innovators, those that have designed and populated with untold millions of subscribers the accessible and inviting dual worlds of social networking and gaming.

Building Communities

Emerging and young adults are defined in large part by their friends. Facebook, a popular social networking site, gives new meaning to the word "friend": it is not unusual to count over 1,000 friends on Facebook, a site that will allow you as many as 5,000 (Statistic Brain Research Institute 2013). Individuals project their identities, virtual representations of who they are, including information about their relationships with one another. Facebook has 1.4 billion users and 98 % of those who use social media are 18–24 years of age (Statistic Brain Research Institute 2013). Participants alluded to the importance of having a virtual community, based on mutual interests; the meaning of community has expanded for many emerging and young adults.

The initial promise of Facebook and other online social networking sites was to encourage social interaction and eliminate barriers among arriving students at

Harvard University. As it expanded, its functionality became more sophisticated. Initially, as one added a friend and was added in turn, users were granted varying degrees of access to ongoing "status" updates. Within a short period of time, data about the new friend became available, all selected and mediated by that person: their photographs, and the photographs of friends and family, as well as videos and other uploaded media content which a friend may "like" and comment on. The degree and intensity of relationships vary, based on need. Users view Facebook as a community with built-in flexibility. It may include individuals one "sees" every day or those who connect with you exclusively through Facebook. One can develop and sustain relationships effortlessly. Recently, a Facebook-generated application culls a photo montage from postings made by the user in the last year and cinematically plays it back. There is no reason to expect that this technology will stand still.

Interestingly, Facebook, still dominant in the marketplace, may be shedding a fraction of its audience. Younger users are encountering Facebook fatigue and spending less time there. Snapchat, for example, rooted in impermanence, privacy, and anonymity, is garnering the interest of younger users. Facebook, however, is a relatively more accessible platform, and it is still in wide use by audiences in every demographic (Wortham et al. 2013).

One of the meanings that can be derived from the rise of social networking is that the definition of community is being transformed. Navigating a virtual community that is capable of interfacing seamlessly with the offline community is becoming integral to the functioning of many emerging and young adults (Konstam et al. 2014). The designation "real" is not a useful construct to emerging and young adults who are navigating friendships in both face-to-face and virtual time: both types of relationships (hybrid and exclusively virtual) are real to them. Erica and Sergio, two emerging adults introduced in Chap. 2, tell us how much they value a platform for the sharing and exchange of ideas, and work toward a new definition of community that is vastly larger in scope.

> ERICA: Social networks like Twitter and Facebook, they become your group. There is a lot of passion about changing the world and making it a better place. You don't see outside of it. You are righteous about it. Your world is a bigger world. It has a larger focus. It is sort of collaborative and interactive. You always have your finger on the pulse of your friends, political blogs, these things are all me, even my friends are me.
> SERGIO: To talk to different people that are in the same boat that you are in—you exchange opinions, you have their experience of different situations, they have yours. … online communities have a lot to do with it, belonging to a community, online or not, where you exchange ideas is a good idea.

Technology and Its Influence on Relationships

Participants spoke about the influence of technology on relationships—i.e., availability of e-mails, cell phones, instant messaging, and Internet dating. They acknowledged the importance of technology and its influence in their day-to-day lives and focused on its ability to inform and titrate the natural course of

relationships. More specifically, technology was associated with the following: (a) facilitation of human connections despite the physical distance; (b) increased availability and potential for immediacy of response; and (c) the ability to build additional communities based on mutual interests via the Internet.

Advances in technology facilitate one's ability to be casual in relationships, increase or decrease the speed and intensity of a desired relationship, and overall provide for increased flexibility in terms of entering and sustaining a relationship. In a study of over 1,000 college students (81 % female), Taylor, Rappleyea, Fang, and Cannon (Taylor et al. 2013) found:

> In general, females were more likely to find it acceptable to hang out and exchange regular text and e-mail messages prior to beginning a committed romantic relationship. In contrast, males were more likely to find it acceptable to share intimate details, engage in "sexting" conversations, become Facebook official, engage in sexual experiences, and moving in together prior to being in a committed romantic relationship. (p. 179)

Technology has both enhanced the way emerging and young adults connect to one another, but has also blurred the lines between dating, friendship, sexual, and romantic behaviors. Millennials are sharing intimate details about their personal lives via what can be experienced as an impersonal delivery system. Technology is viewed by emerging and young adults as a tool for controlling desired distance in a relationship. Linda, Ed, Meghan, and Christie allude to the impact technological advances have had on their personal lives.

> LINDA: There are all these amazing technology advances that are going on and being developed. My friend is in Africa. I just chatted with him this morning. You can chat with people instantly. I had a conversation on the computer with my friend in Africa this morning!
> ED: There seems to be more contact between people in their 20 s and 30 s, usually through technologies, e-mail, chatting on line, text messages, not personal contact. It fosters longer-term relationships, no matter what the contact is. It continues to keep that person in your life.
> MEGHAN: Technology has changed relationships. Technology and travel—airplanes, and cars. Connections and contacts happen at a speed when there is no face-to-face contact. With e-mail, you can respond an hour later. It increases the intensity just because of the rate of interaction.
> CHRISTIE: It was more difficult to meet through a personal ad before, [now it is] a lot easier to post something on-line and there seems to be endless amount of people to choose from, whereas with personal ads you only had 20.

Linda expresses awe in relaying her ability to keep in touch with a friend from college, a relationship that provides her with continued support and adds meaning to her life. Ed, Meghan, and Christie acknowledge Linda's perspective in terms of the ease of staying in touch via technology, as well as gaining access to potential new relationships. On the other hand, technology enables them to be less committed and planful in relationships. Tools such as e-mail and instant messaging provide possibilities for increased intimacy, as well as increased anonymity, as discussed by Jones (2006), and confirmed by Deidre, Justine, and Mark below.

There are urgent and engaging questions that are being raised with the advent of Facebook and other social networking sites. For example, is it accurate to

assume that the more time we spend communicating online, the less time we will spend talking face-to-face? As we stretch the definition of friend to encompass individuals we may never actually meet face-to-face, will the strength of our face-to-face hybrid friendships become diluted or compromised? Do the hours spent on Facebook, a platform that elicits a sense of casual familiarity, reduce the time available for our offline desires and commitments, and thereby discourage intimacy? Norms are shifting, and the perceived value of online relationships to emerging and young adults may be rising. Konstam et al. (2014) discovered that while the vast majority of emerging adults surveyed considered their exclusively online friendships neither comparable in terms of degree of intimacy, nor as influential, or as likely to last, they did use the same criteria to assess both sets of friendships in terms of personality traits, social competence skills, and stages of friendship development. Many emerging and young adults are spending a lot of time interacting with their hybrid friends online rather than face-to-face, as Diana, a 28-year-old emerging adult notes:

> I don't know if this is just me or not, but I actually interact with my… real life (IRL) friends the _most_ online. I write on my best friends' walls on Facebook, comment on their Instagrams, favorite their tweets. I definitely don't communicate with acquaintances through these means.

In part due to the difficulty of formulating the right questions, answers are only recently surfacing. For example, while social networking sites such as Facebook can exacerbate preexisting tendencies toward low self-esteem (Farber et al. 2012), users of social networking sites also report increased self-esteem after viewing their profile pages, particularly after experiencing insults (Gonzales and Hancock 2011; Toma 2010; Toma and Hancock 2013).

Research efforts related to attachment status and emerging adults' experiences in cyberspace reveal interesting insights about our cyberspace behaviors and how they interface with our attachment styles (Nitzburg and Farber 2013). The authors report that for emerging adults, attachment patterns are likely to be re-enacted on such sites as Facebook. The promises of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram must also be considered alongside the way in which relationships are made, maintained, and expressed in online media. In their exploration of attachment status and emerging adults' experiences of social networking sites, Nitzburg and Farber (2013) found that use of social networking sites had the potential to both facilitate the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships between emerging adults and to intensify jealousy, envy, and surveillance behaviors—especially among those individuals with low self-esteem and anxious attachment styles. The phenomenon of "panopticism"— a tendency for social networking users to exaggerate and selectively represent their attitudes, physical appearance, and experiences as more positive and desirable than they actually may be (Gilchrist 2012 as cited by Nitzburg and Farber 2013)—may lead some vulnerable online community members to succumb to the belief that life is unfair and that their online friends and peers have happier, more successful lives than they do (Chou and Edge 2012).

Many social media communities maintain an expectation that users represent the status of their romantic and close friendship relationships, creating additional relationship rituals (Mod 2010) and opportunities for perpetual, potentially obsessive assessment of relationships based on their virtual appearance. Social networking sites have created a culture that encourages users to publically disclose personal thoughts and feelings that might otherwise have been shared more selectively among close friends or family. Instead, online media users participate in exposing their most personal moments on a virtual wall to be assessed by everyone they know (Nitzburg and Farber 2013). Difficult moments and distressing memories that might have been suppressed or forgotten are memorialized in the user's social media history, and become difficult to separate from the user's present identity and healthy psychological functioning (Nitzburg and Farber 2013). For emerging and young adults, increased use and social normalcy of online communities present both an opportunity for connectedness, and a risk of increased vulnerability to low self-esteem, anxiety, and difficulty forming and maintaining healthy personal boundaries.

The expansion of Facebook has been based in large part on its success with emerging and young adults, and reflects the ability of its designers to meet the emotional and social needs of this demographic to feel a part of, to be seen, affirmed, and recognized. In an age of diminishing community and the decline of universally recognizable life designs, the ability to first craft, and then elicit reactions to an identity of one's own choosing replaces social structures that are fragmenting, and augments those that still abide.

Jeff, an emerging adult, movingly discusses the effects of social networking sites on the quality of his friendships. He is philosophical, curious about the future and the ways in which Facebook users will evolve and create a "presence" in an "abstract information world."

> Because people are learning to adapt to live in this abstract information world, many people not only have a physical manifestation, but also this abstract mark. They have no idea what I look like, my personality, my race. I take up considerable real estate in the world that is totally electronic, I have a presence. …There is a me that is completely divorced from my body. This generation, in order to survive, has to learn a completely different set of skills for interacting. What comes after, I am not sure.

No one is quite sure.

Other interesting issues requiring further thought and analysis are emerging. For example, family members and friends have initiated Facebook accounts for their newborn children or are representing their children on Facebook, presumably until their children are ready or willing to take ownership of the accounts. What happens when these children reach adolescence and want to build their own online presence and identity? How can increasingly savvy emerging adults manage their social media image and selectively represent themselves when their parents have already archived their lives in cyberspace? Some Millennials, if they escaped having to confront these questions as children, may soon, in any case, have to confront these issues as parents.

In a column written for the *New York Times* on February 12, Jones (2006), summarizes his observations related to the downside of technology and its impact on relationships:

> In pursuing love, electronic communication allows us to be more reckless, fake, distracted, and isolated than ever before. …men and women are more apt to plunge into love affairs via text message, cut off by Power Point, lie about who they are and what they want in forums and blogs and online dating sites, pretend they're young when they're old and old when they're young, ignore the people they're physically with for those who are a keystroke away, shoo their children off their laps to caress their BlackBerrys. …Has electronic communication officially become the most seductive mistress of all time? (Para. 9)

Deidre, a 32-year-old participant, speaks to the commodification of the individual as well as the dehumanization that occurs in the process of developing relationships via the Internet:

> People don't take relationships that seriously any more, not a lot of personal connection. You can meet someone on the Internet, they can be best friends, you will never meet that person. I do think it is pretty common. It is easy. You don't make time to call them. You can just type up an e-mail, or chat on line.

Justine has a different perspective with respect to use of the Internet and dating, "it makes it fun, because you are anonymous. You can remain anonymous for as long as you want to. When people are anonymous, they become more playful or bold, willing to take more risks. There are no rules."

Mark speaks to the influence of technology on rules of social etiquette and day-to-day interactions. While, on the one hand, technology may facilitate interaction for those individuals who are shy and introverted, technology may also compromise skills acquired in day-to-day relationships and interactions. Mark states that "people who are introverts have an easier time adapting in this particular environment. People who are extraverts cannot derive the kind of energy they need from an existence that is electronic."

Christie, a 34-year-old young adult, suggests that an important venue for sharing one's life, letter writing, has been rendered obsolete due to advances in technology:

> I think what bothers me is that people don't write letters any more. The art of the letter is lost. People write quick e-mails. They have caller ID and choose not to answer their phones. We make communication easier, talking to people in Australia. We're isolating ourselves in some respect as individuals. When people wrote letters, they would talk about meaningful things. …When you check your e-mail it is not the same. Ask anyone how they feel about getting a letter, puts a smile on your face, something special about it.

In summary, participants alluded to the presence of technology in their lives, and spoke about technology vis-à-vis their relationships in interesting and at times contradictory ways. The advent of technology has assisted emerging and young adults to engage with one another in a multitude of ways, some of which create distance and/or misinterpretation, while others promote intimacy and closeness. A prevailing view expressed by the participants is that technology provides individuals the ability to sustain relationships in a global world. Access to technology enhances one's ability to regulate affect in relationships—slowing relationships down or stepping up the tempo, that is amplifying the intensity of the interaction.

It enhances one's ability to modulate desired intensity and intimacy, and can promote time for recovery if an infraction has occurred.

Participants overwhelmingly endorsed the view that technological tools such as e-mail and the Internet have become critical in understanding the communication styles of emerging and young adults, particularly the ways they negotiate their personal lives. With respect to self-expression, many emerging and young adults are exploring their evolving social identity both in their physical communities and in cyberspace. Online gaming, a growing yet controversial forum, proves to be more than a "geeky" pastime as emerging adults establish avatars, build networks at an international level, and develop complex skills in both *actual* and *virtual* realities.

Gaming

Fantasy online role-playing games such as World of Warcraft (WoW) have caught on like wildfire, especially among emerging adult males. Like Facebook, this static dominant platform consisting of approximately 8.3 million users (Kain 2013) faces some inevitable competition: users of WoW have begun to decline in number as gamers choose to play games online that are free of charge. For example, Forbes reported that the free-to-play "League of Legends," has gained approximately 32 million players (Kain 2013). Services such as Steam, a digital distribution and multiplayer platform for online gaming, recently had over 7 million concurrent players (Valve Corporation 2014). What accounts for the popularity of these massively multiplayer online (MMO) games, and how do we understand this cultural phenomenon?

The structures of these games, unlike our nonvirtual world, are clear and unambiguous and create a social forum for adopting new identities. Players role-play characters of their own making called avatars, and can create personae of their choosing. The gamer makes deliberate decisions about features such as race, gender, height and weight of the avatar. Success is defined by fairly traditional markers such as wealth (albeit virtual) and social prestige. A player is deemed skillful if he/she is successful in killing opponents and conquering their valuables. The annual revenue from MMO games accounted for over 14 billion in global gaming revenues in 2013 (GlobalCollect 2013).

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORGs) such as WoW use simultaneous text-based and graphic communication. Like chat rooms, the user has an opportunity to relate to others anonymously. Eighty-five percent of MMORPG players are male, and 80 % are under 30. Interestingly, while the majority of these gamers are emerging and young adult males, 50 % of female MMORG players are over the age of 30, and tend to be middle-aged women who stay at home, and use the computer as a way of "connecting" to a larger world (Nie and Erbring 2000).

It is unclear whether or not fantasy games such as WoW teach or reinforce skills such as imagination and collaboration. Some believe that it services the imaginations of the game designers rather than its players (Gilsdorf 2008). However, we do know that fantasy games are time consuming. Individuals, who are the heaviest

users of online games, when compared to "light" gamers and nonusers, tend to be those who are least fulfilled in their nonvirtual, face-to-face relationships (Nie and Erbring 2000). It is important to note that in describing face-to-face relationships, the term "nonvirtual" rather than "real" reflects the experiences of the gamer. Online relationships are very real to the gamer. Those individuals who are not familiar with the psychology of cyberspace need to make a mental shift and view engagement in cyberspace as real for many emerging adults.

Internet Addiction

Use and abuse in cyberspace has captured the interest and concern of families and professionals working with emerging and young adults alike. It is important to remember that cyberspace abuse has *not* been formally identified as a disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, *the* organization of influence with respect to informing professional practice psychology, psychiatry, and social work. Although cyberspace abuse does not appear as a clinical disorder in the DSM-5 a "bible" to practicing clinicians, there is growing support for acknowledging cyberspace addiction as a legitimate concern. A committee of experts for the newest version of the DSM 5 has decided not to include "Internet gaming disorder" as a formal disorder, given that the current research is insufficient to warrant the diagnosis without further investigation (Tinker 2013).

The prevalence rate of cyberspace abuse is estimated to be approximately 6 % in the United States, and it is anticipated that cyberspace use and abuse will increase as the technology improves. It is important to note that the questions used to assess Internet addiction are not consistent; there is confusion in terminology including the use of terms such as addiction, problematic Internet use, and maladaptive Internet use, and often they are used interchangeably. Reported rates range from 8 % to as high as 21 % in emerging adults (Wilson 2013). Significant gender differences have been reported: 25 % of male university students report maladaptive Internet use, versus less than 10 % of female students (Wilson 2013). The issue of addiction to games is not limited to the United States. For example, in South Korea, the governing Saenuri Party attempted to address concerns related to gaming and its addictive features by proposing an addiction law that treats gaming similarly to drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions. The proposal led to divisive political discourse without resolution of the issue (Kim 2013).

Hall and Parsons (2001) explain that those individuals who are most inclined to be dependent or addicted to the Internet are likely to show the following behaviors:

- They find it increasingly difficult to meet their major obligations at work, school, or home.
- They use longer, with less enjoyment. They are restless, irritable, and anxious when not using.

- They do not succeed in cutting down, controlling, or stopping use.
- They experience physical, psychological, and social problems due to their use, yet they persist in their Internet behavior (p. 319).

Dr. Kimberly Young (1998) of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford defined problematic Internet use (PIU) as follows:

- Preoccupation with Internet
- Need for longer amounts of time online
- Repeated attempts to reduce Internet use
- Withdrawal when reducing Internet use
- Time management issues
- Environmental distress (family, school, work, friends)
- Deception around time spent online
- Mood modification through Internet use.

Dr. Young developed the following eight questions to assess Internet addiction:

- Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet (think about previous online activity or anticipate next online session)?
- Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?
- Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop Internet use?
- Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?
- Do you stay online longer than originally intended?
- Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?
- Have you lied to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?
- Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or relieving a dysphoric mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)?

Answering yes to five of the eight questions suggests a problem with addiction according to Dr. Young. A copy of the questionnaire Young developed to assess Internet use and abuse is available at http://www.netaddiction.com/resources/internet_addiction_test.htm.

The massive expenditure of leisure time in virtual reality raises some questions. Are players staging virtual battles to make up for the lack of conquest, competition, and intellectual exertion in their actual lives? Do gamers presume to remain hidden in their bedrooms, protected by their avatars, allowing these avatars to fight their pending, "real-world" battles for them in symbolic form? Absorbed as they often are, the need to leave the house and engage the world can be reduced to only those activities that are strictly necessary. But what kind of engagement is necessary to build a life, and when will that begin? Further, how will they know the unlived life is missing?

There is no evidence that skills gained in virtual games such as WoW are hard currency in the offline world of struggle and achievement. While for a few, cyber involvement in gaming may consume about as much of their discretionary time as other hobbies, gaming demands more concentration from its devotees than other forms of online interaction, an ongoing activity that continues around the clock. The game is always in progress, and always awaits. In this and other respects, there may be parallels between gaming and other forms of addiction.

What allows us to become addicted to games such as WoW? Are there characteristics specific to cyberspace which facilitate addictive behavior? The answer is unequivocally yes. Cyberspace use and abuse begins with easy access and high-speed Internet capacity. The chance to create and elicit the reactions of others to an online persona is a creative and interpersonal lure. Emerging and young adults engaged in online gaming encounter no interpersonal barriers because, however shy they may be or unattractive they consider themselves, they can create an avatar that exemplifies their hidden grandeur and potency. Additionally, they can take a more grounded satisfaction in being appreciated by other gamers for their gaming skills, a ranked meritocracy in which, with practice and time spent, they may in time be able to take their place. Above all, expenditure of time on the virtual battlefield is critical to success, and is rewarded.

Social interaction on online gaming provides social rewards on a variable, unpredictable schedule that is difficult to extinguish. In vanquishing the formidable foe, individuals most likely receive immediate congratulatory feedback from their fellow gamers, and players experience a biochemical reward when they conclude their martial efforts. Success will elicit peer group respect, if not instant celebrity, and players can develop communities in which they feel accepted and validated. As captured by Young (1998), Steve, an emerging adult says that gaming is a "religion," and in this religious community he is revered, a hero, a saint, with special powers. Steve states "I am respected … I know that I am playing against other highly intelligent people, and developing the winning strategies and getting stronger at the game gives me a great high" (p. 69). It stands to reason that the enticement of managing one's avatar and fighting through to victory and glory—and all this under one's own control—can elicit devotion and sustain compulsive overuse of WoW and other games.

Problematic cyberspace involvement is a maladaptive pattern of use that interferes with the daily functioning of the individual. Those who pass significant hours weekly in cyberspace risk the diminishment or loss of relationships, jobs, and educational or career opportunities due to their obsession. Relief of anxiety and depression and the postponement of once cherished life goals may result from reliance on the rewards and distractions offered by cyberspace, but these temporary gains are paid for by loss of sleep, a failure to meet obligations, and the subsequent disappointment of significant others. Lower job or school productivity follow: a study conducted in a major New York institution of higher learning uncovered the fact that 43 % of students who dropped out tende to allocate much of their sleep time to cyberspace activity (Young 1996).

It is difficult to know which came first, the familiar chicken or the egg phenomenon. Do socially anxious emerging adults turn to gaming, which in turn reinforces social anxiety, or does increased use of gaming cause or exacerbate existing social anxiety? The answer is very difficult to ascertain, and, as in most chicken and egg questions, the answer is most likely *all of the above.*

Parsons (2005) conducted an online questionnaire with MMORPG Internet gamers to try to gain a better understanding of who they are and why they choose to spend their time gaming. His results reveal that gamers choose this activity because it meets their *need for companionship and empowerment.* In other words, they seek these relationships in part because they feel in control and capable. It allows for anonymity and experimentation with roles that differ from the everyday, humdrum experience of jobs, school and the other forms of serial tasking in their nonvirtual worlds. The search for a companion combined with the enhanced confidence afforded by the anonymity of the online arrangement, predicts the possibility of cyberspace addiction among MMORPG participants. Gamers may receive the greatest amount of social satisfaction from their online associations. They may in fact, feel more real online than they do face-to-face. Interactions that do not occur online, naturally, are influenced by innumerable factors beyond their control, and there is, moreover, much more at stake. It therefore is understandable that problematic users race to the online environment, which, if frustrating, is frustrating in more predictable ways, with the tools to fight back always at hand.

A holistic and humanistic assessment of problematic cyberspace behavior or addiction can be helpful in identifying the maladaptive qualities of cyberspace dependence. It can also be acknowledged that addiction can occur in individuals who are otherwise resilient. With a suitable cognitive-behavioral or person-centered intervention, including the use of an approach known as motivational interviewing, an emerging adult can develop alternative and more effective means to confront both larger and smaller challenges. Other capacities can be honed so that emerging and young adults can engage with and be present in the full spectrum of occupational, social, and interpersonal domains available to them. A prospective treatment plan may include, first, a psychoeducational task: that of modifying misconceptions and expectations surrounding gaming. Adjunct to this intervention, a continuum of supportive services similar to those found in the treatment plans of other addictions bolsters the efforts of the client to regain their time and their momentum. These interventions can be tailored to match the needs of the emerging or young adult who seeks treatment.

Conclusions

Social media sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Vine, and Reddit bring immediacy and fluidity to our interpersonal worlds. But, they also wreak havoc on our serenity, bury us in data, and leave us to ask the question,

"where is the rest of me?" Technology is altering the way we interact with each other: the slightest quiver of the needle in our emotional lives, or the smallest life event, can be seismically registered without consideration of its relative importance in the scheme of things. What is up for grabs is a thinning and stretching of our limited attention, "turning into 'pancake people'" as our access to information from the World Wide Web becomes more easily accessible (Foreman, 2005 as cited by Carr 2008, para. 35). Nonetheless, it is of value to remember that there is a lot of variability with respect to how emerging and young adults use technology. While some share their life experiences the second they unfold, others elect to be more deliberate and cautious.

We are beginning to grapple with changes inspired by the cyber era and asking hard questions about how it may be changing us. When does communication with another become a vehicle for problem-solving versus problem-dwelling? New rules of conduct are being developed and modified. And yet, the need to make decisions about who is in and who is out in our interpersonal world, reserving a unique position for those with whom we share our deepest emotions, is nothing new. It can be argued that the cyber world is only modifying this, closing the gap in duration that characterized the letters and telegrams of an earlier era. A new form of presence has emerged, one that previous generations may have compared to a metaphysical visitation. We are dually present, both *here* and *there*—a phenomenon increasingly mastered by those brought into a virtually enhanced world from birth. We can, perhaps, abide in these multiple worlds in a new, hybrid way. Pent up in the virtual world for a portion of the day, there will remain a niche for the expression of humanness. We can connect in cyberspace while retaining the capacity and willingness to complete that connection in three-dimensional, interpersonal space.

The availability of technology offers increased freedom, but can also shackle us. We can navigate seamlessly across these communication options, enriching ourselves and our relationships in the process. We can also become fractured, alienated, overwhelmed, and ridden with anxiety. How we choose to navigate across our communication options, and the consequences of our choices, will no doubt influence who we are and who we become. Emerging and young adults are navigating these tensions, and how they do so will be mediated by the international capital and its regulation, the work of innovators, designers, and visionaries, and their own shifting perspectives and values as they measure convenience against captivity, and autonomy versus belonging. The following chapter examines the anxieties and tensions that emerging and young adults negotiate, more specifically the anxiety of freedom, and the tyranny of choice.

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Chapter 5
The "Tyranny" of Choice: A Reexamination of the Prevailing Narrative

Emerging and young adults are living in an age that seems to be all about choice. Some feel the promise of choice, others the anxiety, and others might be baffled by this assertion. Without a doubt, though, unprecedented if tenuous affluence amidst an array of technological advances has resulted in an expansion of choice (Arnett 2006; Sheena and Lepper 2000). For example, our viewing patterns reinforce the possibility of limitless "on demand" choices. The supermarket experience, replete with choice, is stimulating at best, and at worst, leaves the consumer questioning his/her judgment and capacity to select the "best" for the lowest possible cost. The current college experience barrages individuals with abundance of course selections and offerings:

> Today, the modern institution of higher learning offers a wide array of different 'goods' and allows, even encourages, students—the 'customers'—to shop around until they find what they like. Individual customers are free to 'purchase' whatever bundles of knowledge they want, and the university provides whatever its customers demand….They [students] go to a class, stay ten minutes to see what the professor is like, then walk out, often in the middle of the professor's sentence, to try another class. Students come and go in and out of classes just as browsers go in and out of stores in a mall. 'You've got ten minutes,' the students seem to be saying, 'to show me what you've got. So give it your best shot.' (Schwartz 2004, p. 16)

While choice emerged as an important theme, the experience of choice for the participants representing the two cohorts appeared to be qualitatively different. In keeping with the stated goal of a careful and systematic analysis, one that incorporates and integrates the full range of diversity of experiences of emerging and young adults, this chapter addresses the rich and textured experiences related to choice. The literature related to choice in the context of abundance will be reviewed, followed by a discussion of choice and risk as experienced by the participants in the study. The lives of four emerging and young adults will be presented to capture the diversity of experiences with respect to choice.

Choice: The Prevailing Narrative

The prevailing literature eloquently speaks to the inherent paradox of choice selection in the context of abundance. Schwartz (2004) questions many assumptions related to choice. He argues that the cumulative effect of abundance of choice causes "substantial distress," especially "when combined with regret, concern about status, adaptation, social comparison, and perhaps most important, the desire to have the best of everything—to maximize" (p. 221). According to Schwartz, individuals negotiate choice selection using a variety of approaches, including maximizing and satisficing. In maximizing, one seeks and chooses to accept only the best and seeks to verify that he/she has chosen the best possible option. "As a decision strategy, maximizing creates a daunting task, which becomes all the more daunting as the number of options increases" (p. 78). All options are researched thoroughly. Satisficers, in contrast, select an option that is good enough. One has standards, and stops the search when those standards have been met, in contrast to expending additional time and energy searching for the best possible option. Satisficers are not satisfied with mediocrity. "A satisficer may be just as discriminating as a maximizer. The difference between the two types is that the satisficer is content with the merely excellent as opposed to the absolute best" (p. 78).

One's approach to choice is domain-specific (Schwartz 2004). Nobody is one or the other at all times (satisficer or maximizer). There is a dynamic interplay between maximizing and the social context of abundance. In an affluent society, characterized by an abundance of goods, individuals seek products that are inherently scarce. The more the competition for inherently scarce goods, the strategy of good enough is not good enough. Maximization is most likely to be utilized in times of abundance, which in turn may create undue pressure. For example, upon discovering the wide range of choices available when selecting a pair of jeans, and given the availability of options, standards for buying jeans are "altered forever" (Schwartz 2004, p. 9). In contrast, an individual who is unaware of the number of choices available may enter a store, buy a pair of jeans within a short time framework, and thus fail to engage in the maximizing search for the best possible fitting jean.

According to Schwartz, in the context of abundance, choice increases the likelihood of making mistakes, increases the amount of effort that needs to be expended to make a decision, and makes the psychological consequences of mistakes more severe. Given the range of options, an important distinction made by Schwartz is the notion of being a picker versus a chooser. A picker thinks about the options available to him/her and then makes a selection. A chooser, on the other hand, reflects on what is important to him/her vis-à-vis the decision to be made, what is important about the decision, and what the short- and long- term consequences are of the decision. The picker, again, makes selections based on what is available to him/her, and hopes for the best.

Schwartz suggests that we subscribe to faulty assumptions regarding choice:

(a) The more choices people have the better off they are;
(b) The best way to get good results is to have very high standards; and
(c) It is always better to have a way to back out of a decision than not. (p. 4)

In response to "the dark side of choice," he presents the following counterintuitive prescriptions:

(a) We would be better off if we embraced certain voluntary constraints on our freedom of choice, instead of rebelling against them.
(b) We would be better off seeking what was 'good enough' instead of seeking the best (have you ever heard a parent say, 'I want only the 'good enough' for my kids'?)
(c) We would be better off if we lowered our expectations about the results of decisions.
(d) We would be better off if the decisions we made were nonreversible.
(e) We would be better off if we paid less attention to what others around us were doing. (p. 4).

Although Schwartz does not specifically address the developmental period of emerging and young adulthood, he provides a framework for understanding choice and how it applies to this population (i.e., choosers versus pickers, maximizers versus satisficers). Many emerging and young adults may be choosing rather than picking, maximizing rather than satisficing, in a way that may be counterproductive in important domains of their life. Hassler (2005) mirrors concerns related to choice raised by Schwartz, speaking specifically to the pressures emerging adults face in their attempts to navigate a plethora of choices. Many emerging adults are burdened by the perceived need to make optimal choices in all domains of their life, in the context of high expectations:

> One 24-year-old says she feels tremendous pressure to make choices that will give her the best education available or affordable, the perfect job that pays four times more than it would've paid my mother, the perfect husband, the perfect house in the new and upcoming area and the perfect family, including the dog, while still maintaining [a] full-time perfect job and figure. (p. 67)

Schwartz offers a cartoon that appeared in the *New Yorker* in 2001, as a possible frame for navigating the terrain associated with emerging adulthood. In a fishbowl, clearly contained by its natural boundaries, a parent fish offers advice to the child fish: "you can be anything you want to be—no limits" (p. 235). Schwartz suggests that:

> Living in the constrained, protected world of the fishbowl enables this young fish to experiment, to explore, to create, to write its life story without worrying about starving or being eaten. Without the fishbowl, there truly would be no limits however; the fish would have to spend all its time struggling to stay alive. Choice within constraints, freedom within limits, is what enables the little fish to imagine a host of marvelous possibilities. (pp. 235–236)

Schwartz argues that in the context of abundance, creating fishbowls that are protected, which allow individuals the freedom to explore and experiment with choices within safe, confined boundaries, may be a strategy that best serves individuals who are barraged with choice. It is important to note that the literature on choice and emerging and young adulthood is underdeveloped, and is relatively silent with respect to issues of diversity (Blustein 2006; Cote 2000; Flores and Ali 2004).

Diverse Narratives: Analysis of Choice Responses

Participants in both cohorts recognized and affirmed freedom associated with choice. They tended to be united by common beliefs regarding the value of choice, especially as it pertained to freedom of choice. Choice was associated with autonomy and individuality. Participants tended to believe that individuals ought to be free to choose on their own terms. They also spoke of the challenges associated with negotiating a wide range of possibilities.

Many participants alluded to the downside of choice, the limitless possibilities that can be experienced as overwhelming and stress inducing. Alexis, a 30-year-old participant, when asked what she finds most difficult about living and negotiating these times, responds, "I guess making choices. I am constantly questioning, and it is immobilizing in some ways." On the other hand, when asked what she finds most satisfying about living and negotiating these times, Alexis states, "the sense of possibility, the flip side."

Alexis captures the coexistence of immobilization with the freedom and complexity of possibility when negotiating choice. She contrasts her experience of choice with the experience of her father trying to negotiate his 20s:

> My father states how lucky we are to have options. When he was my age, it was not the case. It is hard not to agree that choices are wonderful, yet sometimes it seems that navigating through life would be easier if there were fewer choices. Or maybe a set of directions that explained what you had to do… so that you could attain your dream job, and ease the feeling of uncertainty. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and that is why we may appear to be floundering. Yet in reality, we are just testing the many options that are out there.

Susan, a 28-year-old participant, discusses the nature of choice in her work life. She experienced difficulty landing a job, despite her stellar credentials. She required financial and emotional support from her parents for approximately 2 years before securing employment in her field of studies. Susan states:

> I have the space to do it [referring to spending the past two years pursuing a job in her chosen career] because my parents are supportive, helping me out. But I think because I have the option to do it, I am trying to do something I really want to do. A lot of friends, they want there to be a purpose behind their choices, versus the need to make money for the moment.

While the prevailing narrative for the more affluent cohort included ambivalence related to overwhelming choice, for the less affluent cohort, a narrative related to risk and risk management emerged. The economic context informed choice selection and perceptions related to choice. Zach, a 30-year-old single father of an 11-year-old daughter, is trying to find his way as an entrepreneur. When asked how he would rewrite the story of his life, Zach states, "I guess I would have stepped outside of my comfort zone, maybe moving to a new location, being more open minded about career choices and taking more risk. …I would have traveled the world, living abroad overseas."

When asked what advice he would give to someone about to embark on his/her career path, Zach speaks to the importance of taking risks:

I would tell them to take risks and understand that failure is part of the journey of becoming successful. …What is helpful is having enough choices. I think a lot of young people feel like they don't have a lot of choices. Maybe they don't believe there are enough choices to make the right decision.

Adam, growing up in a more affluent family context, echoes the importance of taking risks as articulated by Zach, yet his approach toward risk-taking is characterized by self-assurance, optimism, and a sense of opportunity. He provides the following advice to individuals about to embark on their career paths:

I would say to have reasonable expectations. Don't think you will have one job, there is no shame in changing careers. If you change course, you are not a failure. The bad experiences are where you learn a lot, and become who you are. You have to have some tolerance for risk, and not everyone does, and that is fine. Easy for me to say go ahead and take risks, it would be different if I did have a family.

If they are not risk takers and insecure, it [risk] paralyzes them. If you are not optimistic and feel that there is opportunity, if you don't feel that way, your work life will be more difficult. No one wants to hire someone who gives off negative vibes. I never feel like you have no options, not for college educated people, how can you feel you have no options?

Discussion related to the experience of choice was qualitatively different for many of the participants in the less affluent cohort. For some, there was a perception of scarcity of choice. Navigating within more limited degrees of freedom, that is, greater restrictions on one's ability to maneuver and take risks, seemed to be the more pressing concern for many of the participants in the less affluent cohort. The need for a safety net limited choice selection. Michael, an employer of emerging and young adults, eloquently captures the tensions related to choice and risk for those emerging and young adults who are struggling with lack of sufficient economic resources:

[With more limited economic resources] they have to be risk takers. If they don't take risks, they are more inclined to be locked in. [However] they have to think about safe risks…They need to take risks, but it is risks that are calculated, they are not mindless risks. …The affluent person, [going with one's gut] trying out options, can do so without negative consequences. He can simply go with his gut. No matter what happens and what he does, when he takes paths that involve risk, he will be safe.

Calculated risks, according to Michael, involve:

Making decisions that involve a careful analysis of the pros and cons, carefully weighing the pros and cons, and keeping an eye and focus on the prize. [Economic constraints impose a scenario where] the margin of error that is allowed is less. Kids in affluence have a much larger margin of error. Race and class influences people's choices, narrows their ability to take the risks they have to take. In order to be responsible, they cannot take risks as freely, [in part] because of commitment to other people in their lives. I think it is helpful to be thoughtful about what the consequences of choices [that one makes] are. Having someone to talk to, people who will not ridicule you, will stand by you regardless, being willing to make use of confidantes, can help a lot with margin of error.

Frank, a young adult himself, currently a supervisor of other emerging and young adults, echoes the sentiments expressed by Michael, specifically the need for caution in navigating risk:

In this economic climate, individuals do not have the luxury, the freedom, to take a chance and fail. It would be devastating and have repercussions throughout their 20s and 30s. For example, individuals who have recently graduated, trying to set up shop, if their credit is okay, the bank will extend them a loan. [However, they are at significant risk], if they overextend themselves, and if they don't have finances and the safety net of the family. This is where caution comes from. [Emerging adults need to be] more cautious about how they go about their business.

…It is so hard to maintain status quo these days, never mind getting ahead of the game. To have the ability to extend credit, and have to deal with the reality of extending cash, the risk is greater for those on their own. Once you fall behind, the system is set up in a way [that will increase the probability of failure]. It makes it so that you will stay behind, with finance charges and penalty costs. The system is setting people up for failure, and that is where the caution is coming from. The ability to fail is so apparent and so easy to trip into. This is particularly true for individuals who do not have that safety net financially from their family. Yet, one needs to be proactive, self-motivated, in this environment. Those are the people we hire, who take advantage of the system.

Both Frank and Michael speak to the difficulties emerging and young adults face in the context of limited financial resources. While on the one hand, assuming risk is critical to the process of navigating the terrain of emerging and young adulthood, the consequences of experimentation and the ability to recuperate appears to be increasingly compromised in the context of scarcity. Errors made along the way can be far reaching, especially with limited safety nets. Subsequent ability to engage in experimental risk-taking behavior, a process critical to this developmental stage and times, is stifled.

Apter (2001) concludes that emerging adults are negotiating a context of "decreasing social capital" (p. 267), a context that privileges those with safety nets:

Today young people need continuing support as they find their footholds in the adult world. As their futures appear before them more like a maze than a set of paths, they need others' focus and involvement. During this passage, young people are more or less forced to become navigators who negotiate opportunities and risks. Those who succeed in tolerating risks and change, and navigating this passage successfully, are those who continue to have a parent's responsive care, attention and support. (pp. 261–262)

According to Apter:

[Emerging adults] crave a supportive forum in which they can explore possible solutions to present impasses and paths to their futures. …Over and over, they expressed a wish for more personal guidelines and safety nets. …they crave acknowledgment of their hopes. This acknowledgment can be expressed by helping them develop plans to realize their hopes. …[they] benefit from parents' wisdom and experience in aligning their ambitions with their current choices. …Research repeatedly shows that young people who are able to see their ambitions through and recognize opportunities spend a significant amount of time with their parents discussing actions and strategies to help them reach their ambitions. (p. 264)

In this sense, being an adult does not mean standing alone. Apter proposes that there needs to be a revision of our concept of "real adult" and what he or she does in the role of adult. According to Apter, the "real adult" knows how to be responsive, knows how to use his/her knowledge and practical skills to help others. We

help … by setting a good example of how to behave toward another family member, how to show continuing care" (p. 265).

Many of the participants who were constrained by economic limitations and family obligations showed fierce resolve to overcome adversity. They were able to assume adult roles, and honor their commitments to others. However, their impulse to follow their dreams had, at times, to be deferred or reconsidered. For example, Genessee, a 27-year-old participant, expressed a desire to pursue graduate school, but given financial and family responsibilities, has chosen to defer resuming her education. The meaning of choice as it relates to emerging and young adults needs to be contextualized to include and integrate experiences related to economic and emotional scarcity.

Sarah, Genessee, and Zach, each struggled with choice. Their narratives represent a diversity of experiences, and raise interesting questions about the prevailing choice narrative. The rest of the chapter focuses on the experiences of the emerging and young adult participants with choice, addressing the interplay between choice and the available resources during the developmental period of emerging and young adulthood.

Sarah

Sarah, a 25-year-old single female, articulated a life plan, "a vision" she developed that includes the pursuit of three sequential careers: (a) account planning in advertising (a career she plans to pursue during for the next 4–5 years); (b) teaching elementary school age children (a career she plans to pursue in her 30s while perhaps raising children); and (c) developing and growing a small business (a career she plans to pursue in her 40s). Sarah encountered significant difficulties executing the first phase of her plan, due to what she perceives as a highly competitive, saturated market place. She engaged in a job search for 2 years, and has just recently procured employment in her field of study, advertising. She remains guardedly optimistic about her chosen career stating: "hopefully I held out for something I want to do." In speaking about choices, Sarah reflects on her college experience and states the following:

> We had a lot of choices, a lot of emphasis on it being okay if you did not know what you wanted to do. We were allowed to pick a lot of subjects and like all of them. We did not have to commit too much. We could take classes in acting, writing, philosophy, psychology, all over the place, and that was seen as a good thing. I think ultimately it is a good thing. But, you now have to pick something, and you are not prepared for it as well as you could be. There is so much possibility and choices.

Sarah shares her ambivalence regarding her decision, speaking to the difficulty she has experienced entering the field, and the culture of the industry as she perceives it. While she understands that company loyalty to employees is scarce, she also associates a dearth of loyalty with the creation of an environment that encourages one's personal best:

Clients are not particularly loyal to the industry [and that is reflected in the way employees are treated]. You become a commodity. They trade employees like they trade baseball cards. I think it makes it exciting. Everyone is competing to be the best, and it creates very high standards, which makes it a challenge. All things being equal, it is nice to work in an industry that is constantly adapting, and tries to make it better. That said, that's why I only want to work in advertising for four or five years. And then I will be a teacher, and I will be able to breathe a little more.

At the age of 25, Sarah feels that she has been raised to believe that she is lucky to have choices in her life. Her parents have supported her quest for fulfillment, both financially and emotionally, providing a safety net that enabled her to endure her grueling search of 2 years for the current position she holds in advertising. Sarah's choice of three sequential careers resulted from feeling ill equipped to deal with the sheer number of choices available to her. Each is informed by Sarah's passions, selected in part to coalesce with a lifestyle choice that Sarah views as consistent with what she anticipates will be her needs at different developmental junctures. Sarah's view of work is an interesting one, a product of the times, and her experiences growing up in an affluent community, "work is like a jigsaw puzzle that has boundaries. It is more a mosaic jigsaw puzzle, and you're basically the artist. You are the artist and you have to fit the pieces so it looks right to you."

The mosaic jigsaw that Sarah constructs requires patience, perseverance, and skill. Sarah views herself as the solo agent responsible for developing her career, an agent who will make the pieces fit in a way that is optimally pleasing to her. She laments the fact that she did not have sufficient experience with making choices during her childhood, choices that include experience with loss. Sarah, a maximizer, in most of the domains in her life, states that she is barraged with choices on a daily basis, but feels ill-equipped to sort through, and rule out possibilities.

Sarah recalls a weekly family ritual of going to a candy store with her mother, a ritual she associates with affection and love. Her wish for "a lot" of candy routinely resulted in her mother selecting it for her, in a weekly allotment. The process of choice selection would re-occur the following week, with her mother assuming responsibility for narrowing and making the selections for Sarah. Looking back at the experience, Sarah would have much preferred to make the initial selection herself, creating the need to deal with choice, prioritizing and excluding possibilities. This would have better positioned her to engage with the process of choice, feel more secure about her choices, and empowered her to feel more assured in her pursuit of creating the right "mosaic jigsaw puzzle" she needs.

Sarah laments the lack of opportunity to practice, to work through coming to terms with not being able to have it all. She wishes she had the opportunity to prioritize and narrow her selections in a wide array of domains. It is interesting that her life plan at this moment in time includes planning and prioritizing her anticipated developmental needs at future junctures. With respect to another domain, her romantic and future family life, Sarah makes it clear that she would consider long-term commitment and marriage, conditional on meeting the "right" person to share her life, but also including the option of having a child outside of marriage.

Genessee and Zach describe their experiences with choice somewhat differently, using a different frame to describe the process of being on their own. While Sarah knows that her parents will support her financially (and emotionally) should the need arise, Genessee and Zach talk about responsibilities and constraints imposed upon them based on fiscal and emotional realities. Both Genessee and Zach, single parents in their teens, wish for experiences that expose them to a wider world, but at the same time express gratitude for being able to take care of themselves and their families, having learned invaluable life lessons along the way. Their evolving skills are a direct outgrowth of their valued experiences as parents and professionals in the work force. The role of mentors is particularly salient for Genessee and Zach.

Genessee

Genessee is a 27-year-old Black woman, recently married, with two daughters, aged 10 and 1. She is currently working as a supervisor of parent trainers, providing workshops designed to assist parents in their roles as advocates for their children. Genessee presents as determined and focused.

Genessee recently completed her college degree after 8 years. She became pregnant at the age of 16, raised a daughter as a single mother, assuming multiple full-time jobs along the way, many in the social services, to help support herself and her daughter. Genessee is currently married with a second child. She is very committed in all domains of her life, regretting that she does not have the time for "much of a personal life." She describes her life as "hectic" as she juggles her multiple responsibilities as a working woman, wife, and mother:

> Sometimes I feel like I don't have a life. Getting together with girlfriends, I just don't do it, there is not enough time. The way I feel right now, I feel like I am really missing out on life. I am working so much trying to make ends meet for my family. And I don't have any time to do anything else. I'm up very early in the morning and I go to bed late at night. The majority of the time, I don't take any time for myself.

Genessee brings a sense of purpose, curiosity, and determination to all domains of her life. She articulates a life plan that includes moving to the South with her family and opening a business with her husband. This move is a calculated one, including possibilities for home ownership and a less hurried and harried existence, one that allows for greater time for friends and family.

Genessee brings a maturity that belies her chronological age of 27. She says she feels like she is 40, and talks, somewhat surprisingly, about her legacy:

> Figure out what I want my legacy to be. I want to start early, figure out what I stand for. I am here for a purpose and I want to do something significant with my life. I want to contribute.
> I want to have an impact on people's lives. I had three teachers who stuck by me, and if it were not for them, I don't think I would be where I am. I still maintain relationships with them today.

Genessee believes that many emerging and young adults have not had sufficient experience being on their own, and learning how to make choices on their own:

> My mom taught me how to take care of myself and my business. I might have been evicted. I don't think I would be as together [if it were not for my mom]. I don't think they [emerging adults] have had enough life experience to make them ready, they have had no experience being on their own, and all the responsibility that comes along with that. …What makes me happy is a sense of accomplishment, the personal gratification I get, that makes me feel good. …I have been able to secure a position that sustains my family. I have been able to compete in the world.

In reflecting on her career, Genessee states that one should not feel comfortable with the status quo:

> When you sort of get stuck, do not hinder yourself from seeing what is out there in the world. If the door is closed, I want to know what is behind it. I am curious. … I have always been curious, wanting to know about what is outside, what I see, what I know. I lived in Boston all my life. Just because this is all I have known, does not mean this is all I want to do.

Genessee wants to create a life for herself and her family that includes greater possibility and choice, and also contemplates going to graduate school, once she has gathered sufficient economic resources. Like many in her cohort, Genessee laments that she has not had the opportunity to travel, to see and experience a larger world—the ability to experience a "larger fishbowl." However, she states that with the advent of the Internet, "you can go anywhere you want, all over the world."

Genessee does not speak in terms of abundant choices. Although she is highly aware of a world of possibilities, she is focused on providing possibilities and abundance of choice to the next generation, i.e., her daughters. To her eldest daughter, she communicates that "education is key. You can do whatever you want, whatever makes your boat float is what I want for you." Genessee envisions a world fueled by passion and a sense of purpose for her two daughters. For herself, her responsibilities as a supervisor, wife, and mother preclude experimentation with choice; her energies are channeled toward coping with an overly scheduled life that does not allow for spending time with friends, cultivating new relationships, or exclusive focus on her own needs.

Zach

Zach is a 30-year-old middle child from a family of seven who assumed a great deal of responsibility for helping his mother, a single parent, both emotionally and financially. Zach, himself a single parent, resides with his 11-year-old daughter. After working in education for 4 years, Zach is trying to develop his own business, selling food products over the Internet. He joined the Air Force when he completed high school, and took 6 years to complete his college degree. Referring to his college courses, he states:

> I wish I knew back then what I know now. …I would have taken more risk. I would have traveled the world. I guess I would have stepped outside my comfort zone, maybe moving to a new location, being more open minded about career choices and again taking more risk. Challenging myself more. You need to believe in yourself, challenge yourself, and expect more out of life.

Like Genessee, Zach wished he had allowed for more diverse experiences in his 20s, and risk taking. He regrets not challenging himself intellectually, as well as emotionally. Zach is, however, challenging himself as an entrepreneur. He counts on two mentors, one who provides him guidance in the spiritual realm, and one who provides him guidance in his career as an entrepreneur:

> I have a couple of mentors. I have a spiritual mentor, a gentleman in my church. I go to him for advice in terms of everyday things I deal with as a Christian—relationships, temptations, personal conflicts. Someone I look up to. …My second mentor is an entrepreneur. He gives me some advice about my business. He teaches me wealth strategy techniques. For me, to have a mentor, somebody you look up to, who is successful, who is already where you want to be, is important. The true meaning of mentors came through when I got involved in e-commerce. I see now how important it is for me to have mentors. It makes sense to listen to people who already have been there, who are invested in you.

When asked to provide a metaphor for his work life to date, Zach states:

> A rat race. But I think a rat race with optimism. What I mean is that even though I realize I might be in a rat race, there are opportunities to get out of the rat race. I just have to make a plan and work my plan.

Zach strives toward balance and tries to avoid the loss of perspective he sees around him, concerned that, for many people, too much energy is going into work at the expense of relationships and family, and with some risk to children. But Zach is unequivocal about choice:

> What is helpful is having enough choices. I think a lot of young people feel like they don't have a lot of choices. Maybe they don't believe there are enough choices to make the right decision. …What is helpful is if they have a strong support system, friends, teachers, mentors.

Conclusions

Choice emerged as an important theme for both cohorts, although the experience of choice appeared to be qualitatively different for the two groups. While limiting the size of the fishbowl seemed to be an apt and insightful possibility for those emerging and young adults who struggled with abundance of choice, expanding the size of the fishbowl—with ready access to a safe harbor—seemed to be the choice of emerging and young adults with limited economic resources. The prevailing narrative, as represented in the literature, appears to represent the diverse voices of affluent emerging and young adults. For those with fewer economic resources and safety nets, a different narrative emerges, one related to risk and risk management. Participants in the less affluent cohort may prosper in an environment with a wider range of possibilities, a larger fishbowl in which to swim.

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Chapter 6
Voices of Emerging and Young Adults: In Pursuit of a Career Path

> Mom: Are you here to stay now?
> Biff: I don't know. I want to look around, see what's doing.
> Mom: Biff, you can 't look around all your life, can you?
> Biff: I just can't take hold mom. I can't take hold of some kind of life.
> *Death of a Salesman*,
>
> Arthur Miller, l949
> (As cited by Schulenberg et al. 2004a, p. 1119)

The myriad voices represented in this chapter reveal the diverse tactics and strategies deployed by emerging and young adults as they consolidate a professional identity. Embedded within a work context of uncertainty and lack of permanence, as well as concerns that the economy will not sustain its current trend of growth, many emerging and young adults are experimenting with choice. Given the greater period of time it is taking to reach key milestones in comparison to previous generations (i.e., career, marriage, and children), emerging and young adults are potentially well positioned to make creative and informed career and personal choices.

In an environment represented as rich in possibilities, yet with no real assurance that hard work will be rewarded and that their hopes will be realized, emerging and young adults navigate this uncharted terrain with anxiety. The search for meaning and freedom to pursue their passions have created an employed cohort increasingly likely to be working in jobs that do not match their interests and abilities and at wages that cannot sustain their expected lifestyles, let alone their desire for financial independence (Hamilton and Hamilton 2006; Rampell 2013). This chapter focuses on the experiences of emerging and young adults trying to "take hold of some kind of life" professionally.

The identification and consolidation of a career is an onerous process. Statistics related to emerging and young adults and the world of work are causes for concern. In May 2013, for example, the unemployment rate for emerging adults in the United States (13.2 %) was nearly twice the rate of unemployment in all other age groups (ages 25–34, 7.2 %; ages 35–44, 6.2 %; ages 45–54, 5.9 %; age 55 and older, 5.3 %)

(US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Given the reciprocal relationship between increased access to education and a market flooded with young, educationally overqualified candidates, college-educated emerging adults are in the position of having to take low-wage and low-skill jobs in keeping with the reality of degree inflation (Rampell 2013). Furthermore, work choices have direct bearing on their personal lives: 31 % have postponed either getting married or having a baby. Approximately, one-in-four (24 %) report they have moved back in with their parents after living on their own (Pew Research Center 2012).

Settersten (2008) sets the stage for understanding the unstable, changing terrain emerging and young adults are encountering. These changes include:

> [An] expansion of secondary and higher education; a decline in the availability of full time jobs; an increase in the proportion of individuals concurrently pursuing higher education and work; an increase in the labor force participation of women; an increase in cohabitation; delays in marriage and childbirth; a decline in fertility; and the expansion and retraction of welfare state policies and programs. Major cultural shifts include weaker normative controls on behavior and greater individualization, both of which have allowed young people more freedom to plan and live in accordance with their interests and wishes, and the emergence of feminism, which has reoriented the priorities of women … [These changes have] altered the nature of the entire life course. (pp. 534–535)

Institutional structures designed to support the transition to adulthood are in short supply. Schulenberg et al. (2004b) describe the realities emerging adults are encountering:

> In comparing the transition into adolescence with the transition into adulthood, it becomes evident that there is far less institutionally and culturally imposed structure on young people. …On the positive side, this relative lack of structure can allow for greater self selection of paths and activities. …However, for some young people, the relatively sudden drop in institutional structure can be debilitation, creating a mismatch between individual needs and contextual affordances. This discrepancy can result in avoidance of life tasks during this time. (p. 801)

Because they are frequently the last to be hired and first to be fired, emerging and young adults have felt the impact of a weak economy most acutely. Among 18- to 34-year-olds, 49 % have taken jobs they didn't want in order to pay the bills; 24 % have taken an unpaid job to gain work experience. More than one-third (35 %) have returned to school and attribute their decision to the unfavorable economic environment (Pew Research Center 2012).

Jeff, a 29-year-old, speaks of the sense of transience that typifies many of the participants:

> Everything is temporal; nothing is permanent, compared to prior generations. [It is] easier to move, to get divorced, to live in temporary housing, much easier to pack up and live life as you know it. Put your stuff in the back of a car and move foreword.

In speaking about their work lives, common themes emerged for the participants in the study. Themes applicable to both cohorts include: (a) the disconnect between their school and work experiences; (b) lack of loyalty to employers; (c) the importance of passion; and (d) expectations revisited. First, their assessments of their work settings, specifically in terms of the levels of satisfaction they experience at work.

Satisfaction Levels at Work

Both cohorts were asked to assess the degree to which they were satisfied at work; a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 10, 10 indicated the greatest level of satisfaction, was used to assess work satisfaction levels. Emerging and young adults in the affluent cohort reported less satisfaction. For the less affluent cohort, a mean score of 7.72 (SD = 1.81) was reported for work satisfaction. In comparison, a mean score of 6.94 (SD = 2.09) was reported by the affluent cohort.

When asked to identify what would have to change in a positive direction for participants to assess their work lives as optimal (on a Likert-type scale, ranging from one to 10), interesting differences as well as similarities emerged between the two groups. For the less affluent cohort, 30.3 % of the participants identified the ability to "make more money," which they associated with increased satisfaction levels. They also identified the following with greater levels of satisfaction: (a) ability to procure more challenging work (12.12 %); (b) ability to exercise more independence and choice at work (12.12 %); (c) ability to procure more fulfilling work (12.12 %); and (d) ability to report to more competent and supportive managers (12.12 %).

For the affluent cohort, 16 % of the participants identified the need to have more responsibility at work, as well as the need to work fewer hours. They also identified the ability to exercise a greater degree of independence and choice (8 %), a greater degree of appreciation of their abilities by their respective employers (8 %), "more money" (8 %), more security, primarily attributed to outsourcing (8 %), and the ability to spend a greater amount of time working directly with colleagues (8 %). Common to both cohorts was the desire to make more money, as well as the desire to exercise more independence and choice in their respective work settings. The less affluent cohort focused on the ability to report to more competent and supportive managers, while the more affluent cohort focused on the ability to be appreciated by their supervisors. The narrative data supports the finding that emerging and young adults are seeking more responsible, challenging work that involves the exercise of independence and choice.

Given that age 29 has been reported as a developmental marker by the participants, and documented by Sheehy (1995), work satisfaction was analyzed by age (participants, ranging in age from 25 to 29 were compared with participants ranging in age from 30 to 35). Analysis of mean scores for work satisfaction reveals a mean score of 7.23 for participants 25–29 years of age (SD = 2.09) and 6.86 (SD = 1.59) for participants 30 and above years of age.

With respect to their professional lives, participants 30–35 years of age identified the following work-related characteristics with greater levels of satisfaction: (a) ability to generate more money (21.74 %); (b) ability to exercise more independence and choice (13.04 %); and the ability to have more fulfilling work (13.04 %). For those participants 25–29 years of age, the following was identified with greater satisfaction: (1) ability to generate "more money" (18.18 %); (2) ability to work fewer hours and work and report to more competent and supportive management (12.12 % respectively); and (c) ability to have greater opportunities

in terms of professional advancement and promotion, as well as the opportunity to engage with more challenging work (9.09 % respectively).

Disconnection Between School and Work: Changing the Rules

In both cohorts, participants entered their 20s with expectations regarding how their lives would unfold. Upon graduating from college, many encountered "reality checks" that were difficult to incorporate and integrate. They reported feeling unprepared for the abrupt shift that occurred once they entered the workforce. Individuals in their 20s who were prone to feelings of disconnection were those situated in entry-level jobs that required no specific skill-sets, other than a college degree. The disconnection was often jarring. Rules mastered during their college years no longer seemed to apply. In speaking about the transition to work, Carol states, "you know what it feels like, like white water rafting and ending up on a huge lake. [College was] very intensive, very pressured, very directed, and now it is open sailing. Trying to figure it all out is hard."

Many of the participants implicitly or explicitly believed that their work life would approximate college life, with some modifications. Their work expectations allowed for the possibility of restructuring job responsibilities to capitalize on their individual strengths. In addition, many held the expectation that they would be valued and respected in the work place. There was also an expectation that their work-related activities would matter, and that they would be able to have influence in work-related decisions. Representative comments were varied, and ranged from the philosophical to the mundane, as Ruth describes:

> I felt like my brain was turning into mush, the tedium of it. Yes, in school you are held accountable. At the end of the day, in school, it is still all for you. In a job, no one really cares if you are learning. That is something to get used to. There is much more mundane tedium. And you are not working at the same level as college. You are going backwards intellectually. During my college years, my brain was working more than it is now. Now, it turns into mush. On the other hand, what I do like about work, I learned so much about the way the world goes around, the way the world operates. So many things I still think of. I became worldly, wise… I grew up a lot.

Raymond summarizes his work experiences as follows, "in school, I was being challenged. At work, I am being under-utilized and under-stimulated." Another participant, Erica, states:

> I think that I worked very hard during college. It is hard to adjust to not doing rigorous intellectual work. I had the expectation that there would be a lot of menial work, but that I would still get a chance to get intellectually involved with something. I also thought that I would be well received by supervisors because I am smart [and that did not turn out to be the case].

Alex and Elise echo the frustration expressed by Ruth, Raymond, and Erica, specifically with respect to the lack of growth opportunities they encountered at work. Alex states: "I expected it to be more satisfying. I expected when I started, that

there would be more growth in what I was doing, and there wasn't." Elise continues with a similar perspective:

> You come from an educational environment that caters to you and nurtures your strengths, designed for you to do your best. In the workplace, you are not in environments that are designed to bring your best out, and permit you to grow. We don't worry that we are putting people in environments that are not designed for them to excel. There is a huge disconnect between the world of work and education.

There was also an expectation among many emerging and young adults that they would have an impact on their work environment, that is, that they would have opportunities to make a difference, as described by Ruth below.

Ruth spoke about the disillusionment and alienation she experienced in a job she had procured at an architectural firm. After immersing herself in the job, she expected that the results of her labor, specifically the recommendations she was expected to generate, would be seriously considered:

> Within the firm, there were no private clients, just municipalities, institutions. It was frustrating there… A number of times I encountered very bad luck, the wrong set of political circumstances, change in staff, and then they would decide they didn't want to do the project. We were hired as consultants to give our opinion… I was idealistic, and the process left me feeling [that] this is so useless, and what I am doing is so useless.
> In addition, there was a sense that there was little respect for the individual's time outside of work, and with the advent of technology, boundaries between work and home were viewed as unclear and blurred.
> With e-commerce, it is more fast-paced, there are no boundaries. …You're always on. … It does give people flexibility, but the [lack of a boundaries]… between work and home interferes with people's lives. The old fashioned attitude, *I am not at work, you cannot talk to me,* is not respected. You are seen as a slacker if you take the view that *I don't want to be available at all times, you cannot talk to me at all times.*

Andrea and Mark refer to the work climate they encountered post college:

> ANDREA: I did not expect to be yelled at 10 times a day. Intellectually, work did not meet my expectations. I think I also discovered that client service industries are a drag. People call you to scream to you about something that I have no control over.
> MARK: I was unhappy. The actual job was like filling gas, dirty tough work. I sampled water, installed moderating walls. [I] did not need a master's degree to do what I did. Some of the people who did it were high school dropouts. You really did not need much advanced training to do what I did. [I] did not feel respect from supervisors, only in there for themselves. They did not care about you, which is why turnover was so high.

In summary, many individuals in their 20s, in the process of trying to "take hold of some kind of life," found themselves disillusioned. Those entering highly differentiated fields, (i.e., engineering, medicine, and investment banking), fields that required specific valued skills, were less likely to articulate these concerns. Nadia (a 27-year-old participant) and Maria (a 25-year-old participant), capture the experiences articulated by many of the participants interviewed, particularly those who graduated from college with no specific valued skills.

Nadia states, "We were not prepared for the world of work, under-functioning, and having our brain turning to mush." Maria elaborates on the experiences of a college graduate:

> You go to college, graduate somewhere between 22 and 25, [your] undergraduate degree is worthless without a graduate degree, and you realize it. …You think you are spending $120,000, you expect to get a job. That is a hard reality to face. You are treated without respect, lowest on the rung. Once you start working, you really realize that is how it works. Everyone in college tells you [that] you are so smart, people validate you, and you measure yourself against other people. You may develop a sense of entitlement that sort of pushes you into feeling, what am I doing working at entry level jobs when I just worked so hard to graduate?

Not surprisingly, emerging and young adults enduring these levels of frustration and disappointment feel compelled to revise long-standing assumptions about what they owe to employers, and what those employers can expect from them.

Loyalty or Lack Thereof

In describing their current work environments, emerging and young adults identified lack of loyalty as an important variable in informing their career-related decisions and behaviors. Mindful of the impact of globalization, ongoing advances in technology, and potential economic downturns, participants tended to view the marketplace as highly fluid. Disposability in work settings was viewed as an ever present threat, and job elimination and/or replacement of personnel, a reality. The current work climate placed increasing demands for productivity on its work force, while simultaneously providing fewer benefits and overall a more compromised quality of life. Gone were the days of guaranteed lifetime employment.

Participants, the Millennial children of the Boomer generation, observed their parents (particularly fathers) devastated by job elimination, and saw only betrayal by previous employers, big business, and big government. Some of the participants' parents have been unable to recuperate financially and/or emotionally. Durkin (2005) captures the sense of disillusionment the Boomer generation (and through osmosis, their children) experienced in response to the economic conditions that prevail: "no matter how hard they worked, they were vulnerable" (p. 16). She asserts, "If companies were not going to be loyal…there was not reason to be loyal to them" (Durkin 2005, p. 16).

Durkin (2005) proposes that lack of loyalty is in part responsible for decreased job satisfaction and that American companies are being shortsighted with respect to potential profits. "Employee loyalty leads to customer loyalty, which drives brand loyalty," which drives profit (p. 199). Loyalty, according to Durkin, can be developed and nurtured, regardless of the nature of the industry or size of the company. It requires leadership that is committed to the success of the company and the individuals responsible for its success. According to Durkin, the economic challenges for business in the future will be best addressed with "[a] strong, loyal workforce, with employees who are empowered to achieve their personal ambitions while creating company growth" (p. 199).

Participants spoke to the issue of lack of loyalty and how it informed their view of work. They changed jobs more frequently in comparison to their parents' generation, and attributed their search for better work environments, in part, to lack of loyalty. Representative comments by Amanda, Jennifer, Jeff, Chelsea, Ashley, and David speak to the issue of lack of loyalty in the workplace. In regard to the relationship between lack of loyalty and the comparison of their parents' generation, Amanda states: "I think people are a lot less loyal. Companies are not loyal to them. My parents worked for their companies for more than 20 years." Jennifer, a 29-year-old participant currently working in a technical field that is experiencing personnel shortages, elaborates:

> I think in the past, our parents' generation, loyalty was extremely important. If you worked for a company for a short period, people would look at you differently, they would think you are an unstable person. Maybe not very focused in terms of setting your career goals. And now, more and more are getting higher education. Most companies are looking for talent. Most of my employment experiences do not exceed over two years. Some managers ask [why two years], but it is never a concern for them.

Exploitation emerged as a theme for some of these emerging adults' reasons for the decline in loyalty in work environments. Jeff states: "I think they think my personal experience as an analyst, [that] we are basically resources [to be] taken advantage of as much as possible… In corporate America, 20-year-olds are just resources to be exploited." Similarly, Chelsea and Ashley, both in their 20s, observe:

> CHELSEA: Employers think … you are not fully loyal to them but they are not fully loyal to you. I do think the expectations change from industry to industry. …In [some industries], it is the nature of the industry because the clients are not loyal to the industry. It may be worse now, you become a commodity, they trade employees like they trade baseball cards.
> ASHLEY: I think on the lower end of the job scale, people are replaceable. I think that an entrenched workforce is more expensive for companies. Companies like part-time people. Then again maybe you don't have good workers. People are chasing, looking for something better.

David summarizes his perspective on the issue of loyalty pragmatically by stating "you can't expect someone to make a commitment to anything long-term, if fewer and fewer people make a commitment to them."

Commitment to a Career

Given the participants' perceptions regarding lack of loyalty, they actively experimented with a variety of jobs, trying to establish, grow, or direct their careers. However, for many emerging and young adults, their experimentation efforts led to jobs procurement but not careers. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2012) revealed that among 18- to 34-year-olds, only 30 % of emerging and young adults considered their current job a career; a mere 11 % of emerging adults, ages 18–24, considered their job a career. However, with increasing age, emerging and young adults were more likely to consider their jobs a career. For example, among

those 35 years of age and older, 52 % considered their current jobs a career (Pew Research Center 2012).

Most participants perceived few opportunities for "grooming," and since no one at the helm seemed to be looking out for their interests, they felt compelled to put themselves first. Many changed jobs every 1–2 years when opportunities became available. This was particularly true of individuals who graduated college without specific skills and/or were unclear in terms of career goals. Given their perspective that the marketplace viewed them as commodities, dispensable at will, many of the participants felt they were on their own. A Rutgers-University of Connecticut poll indicates that 58 % of workers surveyed were of the opinion that most top executives are only interested in looking out for themselves, even if it harms their company (Durkin 2005).

Their peripatetic search for better jobs was in part informed by a perception that changing positions frequently would allow them to build their skill sets, and overall better position them to thrive in a highly competitive challenging market-place. The quest for passion and meaning guided their search.

In Pursuit of Passion: Looking for Personal Fulfillment and Meaning

> Follow your passion and the rest will take care of itself
> (Ruth, a 26-year-old participant)
>
> You have to do whatever floats your boat.
> (Shandra, a 28-year-old participant)

A striking number of participants subscribed to the belief that following one's passion(s) was key to finding meaningful work. Both cohorts subscribed to the importance of finding meaningful work. When asked to provide advice to individuals about to enter the developmental period of emerging adulthood, 51.85 % of the affluent participants and 25 % of the less affluent participants most frequently responded by subscribing to the importance of either pursuing one's "passion" and/or pursuing work that they would "love" and "enjoy."

For many, passion served as a marker in guiding their job search. They aspired to find work that would be satisfying, engaging, meaningful, fun, and at times even exhilarating. For many emerging adults, advice given by parents, teachers, and friends, reinforced the central role of finding passion in one's work.

Most participants reported working hard during college, and their expectation was that they would be embraced by a job market that would afford them opportunities, enjoyment/fulfillment, and growth. For many, particularly those with college degrees that did not provide them with specific skill sets that the marketplace valued, disillusionment, alienation, and a feeling of being shortchanged followed. Opportunities did not abound for a majority of the participants in the study. They entered the work force with an unspoken contract in hand: I worked hard in college, pursued my studies with diligence, and in return I will be rewarded.

Participants entered the contract in good faith, trying to follow their passion(s), and anticipated that they would be rewarded for their efforts. Many participants experienced frustration and disillusionment along the way. Daria, a 31-year-old actuary, states "people have this desire to find out what their passion is, and what their true calling is. People don't want to just be a cog on a wheel the way people have been in the past." Another participant, Nick, continues by stating "you're told to pursue your passion… And then you get out into the world, and pursuing your passion does not get you anywhere necessarily, and you have to figure out a new approach. It is a big adjustment."

Clara, a parent of an emerging adult, succinctly echoes the sentiment expressed by Nick. She states, "They've worked so hard and they feel gypped. The world did not deliver a set of goods promised."

Similarly, Drew, a 27-year-old political science major, attempted to heed the advice of his parents: "Do what you love, follow your passion, because you will be better at what you love, and that is important." Drew encountered an unwelcoming job market and many rejections along the way. He had lived up to his end of the bargain, worked hard during college, and found it difficult to fathom how underappreciated and undervalued he felt. Messages imparted by his parents, as well as significant adults in his life, did not resonate with the numerous rejections he received in the pursuit of trying to procure employment. Once employed, Drew felt bored and frustrated in the positions he held. Currently, he is applying to a doctoral program in political science.

Many emerging and young adults noted that their parents worked hard in demanding, all-consuming jobs that provided them with little gratification. Motivated by the desire not to replicate their parents' experiences, they sought jobs that would provide them with fulfillment and meaning. However, for some participants, the pursuit of a fulfilling job proved to be elusive and illusory. In the process, they became anxious and despondent about future prospects. Some appeared to flounder, taking jobs that left them frustrated, unfulfilled, and/or stalled. Others assumed an experimental stance, trying a new job every 1–2 years, attempting to find their "calling," while others immersed themselves in work, pursuing a career path that had been envisioned for them by a parent. Daria expressed frustration related to not taking the time necessary to reflect on her career choice, in part due to the demanding number of hours necessary to succeed in her job, in part due to her experience of being on a treadmill since high school with no time to think about what she wanted for herself:

> Work, work, work. You're on a path, without trying to figure out what it is you want to be. You almost don't know what your opinions are, what your thoughts are. Everyone has been thinking for you. You don't have the skill sets [to think for yourself]. You have been doing, doing, doing, without really questioning.

When asked what advice they would offer to other individuals in their 20s and 30s, most of the participants focused on the importance of being happy, finding meaning, having fun, and making sure that they experienced no regret regarding career choices. When asked what advice they would offer to other emerging and

young adults, Robert, 29, began by asserting that "people want to do something meaningful, whether it is for society or for their company. They want to make a difference." Franco reinforces the importance of finding meaningful work and warns other emerging adults to listen carefully to their internal compass: "don't let the pursuit of financial success interfere with that internal compass that tells you I am satisfied that I am happy." Marla, Jed, Susan, and Thea, also spoke of the importance of finding passion and meaning in one's work:

> MARLA: Whatever you choose to do, you should make sure that it is really what you want to do, not what other people want you to do, and that you are happy to do it. At the same time, work is not college, not every aspect of work is fun, but if you find something meaningful in a piece of your work, at the end of the day it is worthwhile, it is worth doing.
>
> JED: Do the best you can. Do something that makes you happy. Too many people get into bad situations. Find out what you like doing and do it. …Please don't be miserable and bored. …Don't have regrets and say I wish I did this. You owe it to yourself to do cool things you're interested in.
>
> SUSAN: I think it is really important to be working in a situation that you believe in what you are doing, and the purpose of what you are doing. I don't like it when people say work is work, I don't like it. I want to be able to say this feels like fun, this does not feel like work, although I realize this takes a lot of discipline.
>
> THEA: I always believe that it is important to like your work, to enjoy what you are doing. There is a sense of integrity that goes with that, and fortunately for me, wherever I have worked, that has been valued…. I have always believed it is not just a job that gives you money, but it is something that you are passionate about.

Many participants were determined not to replicate the experience of the preceding generation, whose lives may have lacking meaning and passion, as discussed by Clifford, a 27-year-old teacher, who began his career after college in real estate:

> When I was in college during the summers, I started to work summers in my dad's law firm. I could see how unhappy people were. Pushing papers all day. Working in a job they were not invested in. Working there for 20 to 30 years, monotonous, boring, uninteresting. It is kinda sad. I made a decision then if I was going to have a job, it was going to allow me to have flexibility, do what I want to do, work from home if I wanted to, take a couple days off, and it would not make a difference. Make my own life. What I put into it, is what I got out of it. The amount of time and effort I put in was going to be directly related to the amount of money I made.

Hassler's (2005) assertions regarding the role of passion in our work life is illuminating given the emphasis on the pursuit of passion by participants in the study. Most individuals in their 20s, according to Hassler, are not adept at identifying their passions. Although 80 % of her sample (women only) reported that passion was lacking in their work, 90 % of her sample could not identify their respective passions. Hassler illustrates this theme: "passion has become a buzzword, although many of us don't even know what it really means. As a generation, we have become obsessed with finding our passions, and a lot of us have found suffering instead" (p. 275).

In *20 something manifesto: Quarter-lifers speak out about who they are, what they want, and how to get it*, Hassler (2008) asserts that following one's passion, implies, that there is a "fire burning in our bellies," that will drive us toward career

fulfillment and a life of happiness (p. 232). If we aren't passionate about work, we are doomed to a life of unhappiness and lack of fulfillment:

> Rarely, [are] individuals born with so strong a love for art or work… [A] far more common approach to discovering what we want is to follow the natural progression of events. Without any experience in the fields of our so-called passions, it is hard to know for sure that we would even want to be able to make careers out of them. (p. 232)

According to Hassler, while for some careers fulfill a need for purpose and passion, for others, the process of finding passion in one's work can be a more elusive process.

> We put a tremendous amount of pressure… to first realize our purpose (which society brands as 'passion') and then to immediately generate careers that serve it. One reason that previous generations did not complain about a twenty-something crisis is that they weren't consumed by their passion-finding trend. People placed more emphasis on working to support lifestyles that made them happy…. We make our career decisions with so much urgency and finality that many of us get side-tracked and do not follow the flow of our lives or our purpose [and thus we sense an absence of passion]. (p. 276)

Hassler, drawing from the experiences of emerging adult men and women, determines that:

> Career is hands down the number-one issue among twenty somethings. From not knowing your passion, to not making enough money, to not being respected, to wanting to make a difference, to not being able to find a job—there is more confusion and dissatisfaction with this generation of twenty somethings than ever before. (p. 231)

The combination of high expectations, access to education and job variety, and insistence on pursuing a passion, career-seekers and job-holders alike are vulnerable to feelings of disappointment and distress. Hassler (2008, p. 232) asserts that emerging adults "do not even know what their passion is… Many twenty somethings obsess about finding their passion—believing that without it they have no purpose in life." Focusing on a buzzword like *passion* can lead many emerging and young adults to miss or undermine their strengths, interests, and ways in which they enjoy their lives, relationships, and jobs. Fitting these actualities into a working ideal stymies the process.

When considering career paths, Hassler (2008) and Sandberg (2013) emphasize both the importance of honing in on specific skill sets that actual and future jobs can offer, as well as opportunities for social connections. *Meaning* and *passion* can be found in careers; but buried in the descriptions of specific positions are skill sets and forms of social capital that may be garnered for future benefit. These are also critical features that merit the consideration of emerging and young adults.

Furthermore, for many emerging and young adults, work has taken center stage in terms of organizing one's identity. Work can define us as individuals, at the expense of other domains that await further development. This wholesale identity investment in one's career is attributed in part to the uncertain times we live in, a way to take control of one's life. Hassler (2005) suggests that, nonetheless, it is critical to separate what one does from who one is. Otherwise: "if we do not separate what we do from who we are, our identity will always be dictated

by something external—our jobs—and that can significantly weaken our foundation…. No job can fill a void or complete us" (p. 272).

For many emerging and young adults, focusing on one's career seemed to be central to the question of taking hold and control of one's life. Macko and Rubin (2004) describe emerging and young adults and their commitment to career investment. They suggest that, alternatively, investment in the self may be the most reliable strategy in taking hold and control of one's life. Investment in self' translates to investment in career, according to Macko and Rubin. Hassler (2005) suggests a potentially freeing strategy for those unable to identify their passion and or frustrated in their career search: "We have to look at the dream jobs, determine which of their elements we can attain, and then try our hand at those" (p. 277).

> The overemphasis on passion and the pressures we feel to do and have it all propels us into one of two states: either we put ourselves on an accomplishment timeline, or we waver because we don't know what we want. As much as we want to figure out what to do so we can start doing it, not knowing is part of process of ultimately discovering our purpose. (Hassler 2005, pp. 290–291)

Optimally, career decisions are based on the confluence of passionate commitment and developed capacities (Trunk 2006). Although some emerging and young adults may be unable to either identify or pursue their passion(s), they are able to describe a specific dream job, a job that may be outside their realm of possibility. An impediment to finding fulfillment is the pursuit of passion in conjunction with the pursuit of perfection. Deidre, a 26-year-old participant reflects this view, "It's not enough to have a good job and nice friends and family… Older people might think it's enough, but I want more."

For emerging and young adults, particularly for those in the affluent cohort, the search for passionate commitment goes hand in the hand with the search for the perfect life. For some, the quest for perfection occurs in only one domain, most often the domain of work. Others think of perfection more comprehensively: it must include career, love and an idealized lifestyle. For this latter group, unwilling to accept approximations as part of the life path, confusion and despair often result. Daria expresses bewilderment at her inability to take hold of a career, despite the fact that she perceives a good match between her level of preparation and the available rewards:

> Maybe people expect more out of a job, and it is hard to find it. …People don't settle for jobs. People are searching, trying to find their passion, their true calling. You go to different positions to try to find it [passion]. You don't settle…. What should be satisfying is that there is so much opportunity and so many things that you can be doing. You don't have to settle, on a personal or professional level. At the same time, it *is* hard to figure it out. It is frustrating to know that you have all these opportunities and options, but not to know what the right one is for you.

Underlying Daria's assessment is the notion that there is one "right" job, and that it is her task to "figure it all out." To seek a job that is not "the right one" suggests that she is settling for less.

As emerging and young adults manage the balance of living passionately and making smart career choices, Sandberg (2013), author of *Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead*, encourages career-seekers (and employers) to re-conceptualize the

changing nature of corporate loyalty and career-tracks, reflecting: "The most common metaphor for careers is a ladder, but this concept no longer applies to most workers… the days of joining an organization or corporation and staying there to climb that one ladder are long gone" (p. 53). Instead, career-seekers need to envision their career progress as a jungle-gym, rather than a unidirectional path. Being flexible, moving *down* to move *forward,* and not being afraid to stray from an original course are key features in pursuit of a high-impact career. This philosophy is a disturbing alternative for many emerging and young adults who have been trained to work and study on prescribed paths; they expect that success in one area will translate to promotion and continued success in another.

Sandberg finds that women are more reluctant [than men] to apply for promotions even when deserved. Sandberg cautions individuals beginning their careers to guard against expecting rewards in return for job performance. She finds that women often harbor the false belief that exceptional work performance will be rewarded and in turn they opt out of applying for promotions. While emerging and young adults have been taught that hard work and results should be recognized by others, this often is not the case. Emerging and young adult women (and men) would do well to recognize instances of being overlooked as opportunities for self-advocacy rather than disappointments (Sandberg 2013).

For Sandberg, the challenges emerging adults face in navigating their careers are a call to action for emerging and young adults. she concludes that networking, professional self-esteem, and effective mentorship are the trifecta of building a successful career, and for both women and men, these skills and advantages cannot be obtained without assistance. Given the increased pressure to find one's passion individually, and given a tendency to hyper-focus on long-term outcomes (such as happiness, life-satisfaction, and status), emerging and young adults may be missing the boat on successful, nontraditional career paths.

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Expectations Revisited

Many of the participants were still in the throes of resolving dilemmas related to career choice, rethinking basic assumptions related to the meaning of work. As participants approached the age of 30, they were more likely to calibrate and adjust their work expectations. Erin, 34 years of age, spent 7 years as a lawyer and is currently pursuing a second career in public relations. She states:

> If you can do it, just be kind to yourself and lower your expectations of yourself. It is the only thing I can think of, which I find difficult to do. I cannot figure out how not to be hard on myself, but that is the goal. To just accept where you are and just sort of have

that be okay. To acknowledge there really is no superwoman. And to be kinder and more forgiving of yourself for not living up to your own and or others' expectations of you…. I think that is why you have a lot of people switching jobs. Kids are trying to fulfill expectations, go to college, get that graduate degree, but then after the fact, they realize it was rushed.

Ruth tried to follow her passion and need for perfectionism for 10 years. She experienced a series of disappointments related to her jobs, which have led her to conclude:

> People need to take practical things into consideration. Will you truly be happy not making money? One has to follow their heart and yet be practical. You have to have a practical bone in your body. Do you really want to pay off school loans till you are 70?

She summarizes the disillusionment she felt regarding the dictum she tried to follow, "Follow your passion, and everything else will fall into place":

> [My parents] have been very supportive. It is kind of good and bad. It is nice to have parental support, but at the same time because I have floundered, I wish their attitude was one where they said, you just gotta figure it out for yourself. With my own children, they have to do what they want to do, but I might learn from my not necessarily good example. I would tell them to choose more wisely. Whereas my husband would say, you have to get a practical degree, something between me and him is about right. So much to be said about a liberal arts degree being a valid pursuit as an end in it of itself. When else are you going to have the opportunity? But on the other hand, you have to pursue a degree that will give you value, where you will be appreciated for your skills.

Similarly, Marla describes calibrating her expectations:

> I think I was more idealistic… I wanted to be doing something I loved all the time. I realize that now it is almost impossible… especially at entry level…. Hopefully, I held out for something I wanted to do. I am unique in that way. If I get what I want, I have lowered my expectations to a point where hopefully I will meet them. I don't know if I lowered my expectations. I have a better grasp on reality in terms of what I should expect. I may have expected something that was not reality.

A period of adjustment and calibration followed for Marla and many emerging and young adults who participated in the study. Many of the participants found it difficult to balance their need for meaningful, purposeful work with external realities that prevented them from realizing this goal. John, despite graduating with honors, disenchanted and disillusioned, concludes: "I was not ready for the reality, not the way I was brought up. Things I was told that were not the case." Jill also elaborates on her period of adjustment:

> You are told you are the future, you are the leaders, you are the ones that will make a difference. In fact you are not leading the world, just bringing in an income, and I would say that was the hardest part. I felt my first job was so meaningless relative to big ideas in college. Things take a lot longer than you think they do. I think I used to be able to turn something around in a day. Lowering expectations of what you can produce and the contributions you can make, I like being reasonable with my expectations so I am not disappointed. I know my job is not that important, and I kind of laugh at it. In the grand scheme of things I am insignificant. I can make this person happy for one day. Setting small bullets for yourself, no one is steering the ship, it is a big ship to steer. If I was working for a small company, sometimes you can make a bigger difference. Managing expectations,

don't get too excited about something too good, or too bad, things are never as good or bad as they seem.

In summary, emerging and young adults grew up with the assumption that given hard work and determination, they would be able to realize their dreams, assumptions reinforced by their educational experiences. Instead, they encountered an environment that was highly regulated. Participants were emotionally and intellectually challenged not to internalize the rejections and sense of failure they experienced. A process of correction for many emerging and young adults took place, and as Erin states, "We try to go back and correct what they may perceive as mistakes, what I perceive perhaps [as] incompleteness."

Conclusions

The career paths participants took were varied. Some were "on track" and typically entered professional and or graduate schools post-college. Many actively experimented with job possibilities, with most of the participants in pursuit of "passion" and/or "skill sets" to guide their journey. They reported feeling unprepared for the abrupt shift that occurred once they entered the work force. Many became disillusioned and struggled with jobs that were not synchronous with their intellectual capacities and talents. The primacy of developing a satisfying and meaningful career pervaded their narratives. Most of the participants revisited and reassessed their career expectations and choices to date, some with more deliberate forethought, others more randomly, and by age 30 most of the participants were on a career trajectory that, in their view, owned more permanence. Most acknowledged that their career paths would shift over time, given current marketplace realities, and maintained a flexible, open stance. The following chapter explores the experience of career indecision, addressing the benefits of career and self- exploration within the context of floundering, disillusionment, and frequent career change.

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Chapter 7
Floundering or Experimenting: Finding a Vocational Home

> *I am still hoping lightning will hit in the middle of the night and it will come to me as an epiphany. … I can still go anywhere right now. …However, it is also difficult to make a decision given all these options. [I feel so stuck].*
>
> Brad, a 27-year-old emerging adult.

Overwhelmed by the perception of infinite choice and the need for purpose and meaning in their work lives, a growing number of emerging and young adults fear they will not be able to find a satisfying career. Many become reluctant to choose at all. They report feeling unfocused, "lost," and in a place they describe as "nowhere" (European Group for Integrated Social Research 2001; Shulman et al. 2006). Many are unemployed or underemployed for periods that may stretch on for years, while others may be changing jobs every year or two without an apparent rationale or likelihood of career advancement (Hamilton and Hamilton 2006).

In the current economic context, career selection can be *nonlinear*, or certainly less linear in comparison to prior generations. Frequently, emerging and young adults find their way toward career consolidation by a haphazard route. A snapshot of an emerging adult during this developmental period is likely to look blurred and asymmetrical. Nonetheless, choices that appear random may very well seem prescient in years to come.

Since emerging adults develop at different rates, and career choice has become steadily a more complicated process, the strategic decision of emerging adults to leave career options open into the third decade of life may be wise. It is difficult to differentiate those emerging adults who appear to be "floundering," seemingly "spinning their wheels," from those who are sagely avoiding foreclosure and premature commitment in a treacherous job market replete with buyouts, mergers, and cycles of instability. Career experimentation, may be considered an adaptive strategy, whereas floundering is a possible cause for concern and can require clinical intervention.

The developmental period of emerging adulthood can be seen, above all, as a time of transition, in which individuals are working toward greater commitment and consolidation in major life domains (Arnett 2000, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that the daunting tasks of this period open emerging adults to emotional difficulties, including depression and behavioral disorders (Kuwabara et al. 2007). Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies consistently report lower positive affect (Carstensen et al. 2011) and lower levels of life satisfaction (Stone et al. 2010) during this period of development. Overall, emerging adults evidence a marked decline in well-being in comparison to adulthood (Carstensen et al. 2011; Stone et al. 2010).

Although the economic picture is slowly improving in the United States, the adverse effects of the most recent recession still linger, as evidenced by a 13.7 % unemployment rate among emerging adults (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). Unemployment is a significant risk factor for developing psychological difficulties, including depression and anxiety (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005; Paul and Moser 2009). Current social, cultural, and economic factors expose emerging adults to career indecision (Gati et al. 1996; Konstam and Lehmann 2010). Kelly and Lee (2002), experts in the field of career development, assert the following:

> It is clear that our field is not close to specifying the type of treatment most appropriate for different career decision problems….The failure to develop….treatments is rooted in our collective failure to adequately describe the domain of career decision problems [and to relate these problems to solutions]. (p. 303)

The question arises, how can we tell which emerging and young adults are likely to encounter difficulties with career choice as opposed to those who are simply experimenting? They can be very difficult to tell apart. Both can *appear* to be meandering without apparent aim, and selecting options that defy common sense. Yet, while the experimental group may *seem* to be choosing randomly and haphazardly they may, in fact, be cobbling together a career identity, while with "flounderers," it is less certain that a path forward is coalescing. Implications of this phenomenon are significant for our society.

Brad, an emerging adult immersed in the process of career commitment, serves as an example in understanding the complexity of the issues emerging and young adults are navigating, what they may be thinking and undergoing as they labor toward consolidation of their goals and a committed career path. A theoretical framework developed by Kelly and Lee (2002) will be explored and applied to Brad, and possible solutions for Brad are generated and examined.

Floundering or Experimenting?

According to the US Department of Labor, approximately 21 % of workers age 16 and over remain in their job position for a period of 12 months or less (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Among all adult workers, however, tenure at a particular

job varies significantly by age; for example, while workers over the age of 65 report an average of 10.3 years at a job, the median tenure for workers aged 25–34 is only 3.2 years, about one third the duration of their older counterparts. Not surprisingly, and consistent with what we know about identity exploration in this period of development, significant numbers of emerging and young adults are selecting an "a la carte" job menu. As noted in the chapter on identity, they are "sampling" the career opportunities available and looking for those that provide a reasonable or optimal fit.

In the process of weaving together a career identity, awareness of the "rightness" of fit dawns: I *am* a [writer, lawyer, doctor teacher]. The choice of a career has important implications for the ongoing process of adulthood. Consequently, it is concerning that we have not yet approached an understanding as to why many emerging and young adults apparently have the capacity to consolidate their careers, while some seem mired in confusion.

Helpful speculations as to why some emerging adults demonstrate the capacity to undertake the age-related task of career consolidation and see it through, while others postpone and wander, courting the risk of alienation and marginalization, emerge from the work of Shulman et al. (2006). They identified two main orientations toward this developmental task, "reflective-oriented" and "doing-oriented." Doing-oriented emerging adults are likelier to pursue activities for their own sake and reject an introspective approach to both present and future orientations. Reflective-oriented adults, on the other hand, think hard about their current pursuits and their vision of the future. A total of 70 Israeli emerging adults were interviewed, and the results led the researchers to conclude that most career narratives among emerging adults take one of these two paths.

Contrasts between *doers* and *reflectors* reveal interesting differences. Reflectors tend to be able to make sense of themselves and those around them, and in the process of organizing their diverse experiences strive to make meaning of their experiences. They tend to construct narratives about their lives that hold their elements together, and they tend, subsequently, to be less anxious than the doer group. The latter group reflects less and seems to pay a higher price in feelings of confusion and indirection. They are likely to commit themselves to activities which they later find to be a poor match with their actual talents and abilities. Often aggressive in their initial pursuit, they are unwilling to make the internal revisions necessary to adapt to those situations that later challenge their capacities. Others are as likely to be seen, if at all, as obstacles rather than fellow compatriots, who may provide them with support and resources in their search for a career.

This study, it should be noted, was conducted within the very specific context of Israeli society in the first decade of the millennium, in the middle of consecutive requirements for compulsory military service and the completion of post-secondary education. Therefore, generalization to other contexts cannot be made. It is noteworthy that inner directives appear to better motivate the developmental task of career commitment and consolidation than external milestones and achievements. In the next segment, the implications of the work of Shulman et al. will be applied to the concept of "floundering."

Floundering

Super (1957) originated the term floundering, an approach that is characterized by an absence of apparent sequencing in the career building process. Deploying a trial-and-error method, floundering individuals do not tend to make career choices that build upon each other, but instead make random, unrelated selections. The result has an unanchored quality, a vocational homelessness. Reactivity, not proactivity, is the hallmark of emerging adults' responses to opportunity or disappointment, resulting in a process that is not influenced by inner directives, but managed by the emotions of the moment.

Flounderers, as noted by Super, should not be confused with those emerging and young adults in *moratorium*, those making a deliberate pause for reflection between possibly frustrating experiences, or pursuing temporary employment that satisfies urgent financial demands prior to return to a serious search. These choices are often the result of reflection and deliberation and unlikely to result in the stagnation, or the dead-end predicament, of some who flounder.

In retrospect, Super's inferences appear judgmental, emerging from a cultural context that was quite different. Experimentation would not have been considered a legitimate alternative in simpler times, and were not considered in Super's model. Today's realities offer a place for a peripatetic, nonlinear, and trial-and-error method, which, though arguably more disorderly and illogical at times, may well be effective in assisting the emerging and young adult to a more engaged and stable place. Above all, preeminent over sequential, external approaches is the internal process of assessment, analysis, and synthesis. This process engages with what moves and motivates the emerging and young adult, offering the potential of a career choice that fits with their strengths, values, and temperament.

Both Salamone and Mangicaro (1991) and Shulman et al. (2006) underscore the reflective qualities of those who effectively manage the career building process. What makes a flounderer flounder is a lack of a strategic overview of their chances and capacities and how they relate to the realities and demands of the marketplace. Experimenters employ a fruitful paradox, a purposeful and alert drifting that takes notes, in contrast to flounderers, who might find themselves at the end of a blind hallway.

As proposed by Salamone and Mangicaro (1991), the causes of floundering can include:

(a) **Poor coping skills**, which manifest in difficulty with identification of problems and generation of solutions. Acquisition of this skill set is particularly daunting in an era with a complicated and unstable employment picture.
(b) **A diffuse sense of self**. Self-direction, and self-responsibility are characteristics of successfully differentiated young adults, but scarce in those whose sense of self is still unformed.
(c) **Lack of job skills**. Competence and confidence result from mastering job skills, which in turn inform vocational direction and the search for satisfying work. Competence results in confidence, which leads to more competence. Diminished opportunities for skill acquisition nourish self-doubt and unrealistic expectations.

Emerging and young adults who cannot come to terms with commitment to a career are prone to feeling "less than" peers who make choices and grow professionally in their chosen field. Floating from job to job, a meaningful "through-line," escapes them, the connecting thread that links their peripatetic labors in a narrative that holds together. All too often, this results in bewilderment, depression, and anxiety (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005).

There is no acid test with respect to differentiating *stabilizing* behavior (moratorium or experimentation) from floundering behavior. However, given differences in orientation, the following questions may generate worthwhile discussion and helpful insights:

- Does the individual notice any shape or pattern to the job choices he is making. What through-line can be observed?
- Is the narrative or "career story" the individual is telling a story that includes a sense of control and self-direction? Does the individual seem to be making choices in a purposeful way? Or is the story characterized by passivity? Does the individual project a sense of stagnation, frustration, or resignation?
- Does the narrative contain major obstacles that are preventing the individual from moving forward?
- Is the individual *waiting* for something to happen before moving forward? If so, what is the individual waiting for? Is it something external and out of the person's control, such as an upturn in the economy? Does the narrative appear to make sense? Are there any actions that the person can start to take now?
- Notice the person's mood and attitude when discussing career choices. Is there a sense of hopefulness and optimism, or despondency and indifference? Does the person *want* to talk about the subject or would he rather not?
- Can the person identify skills that he has developed in past and present jobs and school settings? In what ways can these skills be synthesized in a more satisfying job?
- Is the person *engaged* in the career identification process, or shut down? (Konstam 2013, pp. 44–45)

Brad is an emerging adult who attempts to comprehend the impasse he finds himself in. A description of Brad below provides opportunities to engage with many of these questions.

Brad

Brad, a 27-year-old emerging adult, grew up in a middle-class household with achievement-oriented parents and an older sister. He is currently "bored" and dissatisfied at work and feels stuck and unsure about his future. Brad rates his current job satisfaction at a 5.5 on a scale of 10 (10 indicating highly satisfied). After earning a college degree with a major in English, he held a total of three unrelated jobs, none of which tweaked his intellectual curiosity nor whet his thirst for meaningful work—jobs not in synch with his values, and hopes of making a "significant

difference in the world." Although Brad has received excellent performance evaluations, he is concerned about his inability to find his calling. Brad states:

> I know my skills are underutilized. I graduated with honors and my job is pretty easy comparatively. I want to be helping society a little more and to have a greater sense of fulfillment. I don't know what that quite means yet. This is not my calling, what I am doing now.

If Brad could do college all over again, he says, "I would have known in school what I want to be, follow[ed] the appropriate route, take[n] classes I needed to take." Brad stacks himself up against his friends who have gone on to pursue specialized careers, and he consistently suffers in the comparison. He knows he has the talents and skills to do more in terms of his career, but he cannot seem to identify what he "wants right now." He feels that "once I figure what I want to do, the drive will come into play. I just don't have my sights on it yet."

> I am still hoping lightning will hit in the middle of the night and it will come to me as an epiphany. But more realistically, I may have to put myself out there and apply for different things and maybe that will help me figure out what I want to do. My life is like an open book. Ahead of me the road is like a blank slate; nothing is written in concrete. I can still go anywhere right now.

Brad attributes much of his struggle to an abundance of choice, but he is a perfectionist and has high expectations of himself; he is seeking the perfect job that will afford him an opportunity to make a difference. Brad hopes that not making a decision qualifies as a strategy, one that keeps his options open.

First, the career indecision model proposed by Kelly and Lee (2002) will establish some guidelines for thinking about Brad and related dilemmas, followed by a discussion of perceived choice and choice anxiety, the quest for meaning and purpose, and their importance to emerging adults like Brad. Understanding how perfectionism may be inhibiting emerging and young adults from identifying a career that reflects their skills, values, and calling will be discussed. Finally, a discussion of the role of leisure allows us a glimpse of how emerging adults like Brad cope with career-related difficulties while they search for a satisfying career.

A Career Indecision Model

A career indecision model proposed by vocational experts Kelly and Lee (2002) provides a lens for viewing Brad more clearly, and affords opportunities to develop hunches about his position at this developmental juncture, seemingly stuck in neutral. By identifying the *sources* of indecision, it becomes easier to think about possible interventions. It is important to remember that indecisive individuals may fit more than one, perhaps all, of the categories identified below. Behavior is usually determined by many causes, and simple categorizations rarely work.

The model developed by Kelly and Lee was based on research with undergraduate students, a population that may well be in the beginning stages of career identification and consolidation. Homogenous and privileged, this population cannot

represent either the full economic or racial spectrum. Self-reports also bias the results: these participants may either catastrophize or make light of their current position with respect to career choice and commitment. Therefore, this model is best understood contextually.

Kelly and Lee (2002) cite the following causes for career indecision:

(a) **Lack of self-understanding** (or identity confusion). It is possible that emerging and young adults do not know themselves very well (yet). They may not have a grasp of their own abilities, characteristics, or strengths. Serious reflection on what may suit them and what they can't abide may not have occurred, leading to a blurred vision of possible futures or none at all.
(b) **Lack of career information**. Emerging and young adults may not have compiled or been exposed to pertinent job market information or career options. Inadequate exploration has occurred, resulting in an unrealistic, fuzzy, or unnecessarily limited view of the possibilities.
(c) **Trait indecisiveness**. Some emerging and young adults may be indecisive by nature, a personality trait that will be apparent in multiple domains, with global effects on functioning.
(d) **Choice anxiety**. Emerging and young adults may feel overwhelmed by the number of options available. This may point to one of the generational differences that strain relationships between emerging and young adults and their parents, who may have been able to identify their options more easily, hence fail to appreciate the bewilderment of their grown children when faced with option overload.
(e) **Disagreement with significant others**. Emerging and young adults may be swayed by the expectations and opinions of significant others (most likely, but not necessarily parents) opening a chasm between what they want for themselves and the vision of the future conceived for them by others. Indecision is the result, coupled with a reluctance to incur censure by discussing their ambivalence.

There is frequently a multiplicity of factors—individual, systemic, and economic—which inform the career-related behaviors of emerging and young adults (Park et al. 2014). Using the model described above, Brad's indecision can be understood as a combination of the following elements: lack of self-understanding, choice anxiety, and possibly parental disagreement related to Brad's perceived inadequate career management.

Using the model proposed by Kelly and Lee, choice anxiety is helpful to understanding Brad's inability to articulate a vision and career. Perceived career-related choices abound as universities and vocational schools provide an unprecedented number of career training options. Career websites feature a mind-numbing array of job specializations. It is therefore not surprising that Brad associates abundance of choice with difficulties generating a future career plan that works for him. In attempting to navigate abundance of choice, Brad's primary coping style is to pursue career options by allocating approximately 12 h a week on the Internet in search of the perfect career. He becomes overwhelmed, at which point he disengages from

the process, and assumes a wishful stance (e.g., he hopes "lighting will strike," interestingly, while he is asleep) that will provide him with direction. Brad adopts a strategy of wishful thinking without productively engaging in the necessary work of reflection that will help him get unstuck, while nonetheless aware that he needs to take a different approach.

Intent on keeping his possibilities open, the idea that he has not closed any doors is a comfort to him. Yet he also admits being overwhelmed by the possibilities:

> There are so many options, it's stifling. I think life would be a lot easier if my dad worked in the factory and I knew that I would work in the factory, and that was all there was to it.

Brad longs for the clear sense of direction he sees in some of his friends. "The ones who know the track they want to be on can pursue it with gusto. People who know what they want are advantaged in the marketplace." He laments:

> The road was clear in high school. It was very prescribed, now it is not. There were people pressuring me. It was more cause-and-effect in high school. People were telling me what to do and I did it. Now it's up to me.

Brad hopes and expects to find a career that inspires him, one that evolves from his heart and fully engages his gifts. "I have the luxury," he says, "of not working to survive; I'm hoping to work so that I can be fulfilled." But several questions arise regarding Brad and others like him: Is he sufficiently experimenting with making choices? Is he playing the indecision card as an excuse to stay in his comfort zone? Is he taking too much solace in the fact that he has not foreclosed on his options? Is his need to keep limitless opportunities open actually immobilizing him? Are there any action steps he could be taking to identify some positive options? Might making a choice—*any* choice, right or wrong—be an improvement right now, as it would help him narrow down his desires and preferences? And lastly: at what point will his failure to choose become, in itself, a limiting choice?

Brad needs to understand that by not making a decision, he *is* making a decision that may well close off options. Feldman (2003) explains the problem in this way:

> …as individuals pass into their early-and mid-20s, the effort to keep future options open can impede career progress as much as facilitate it. Since every career decision can potentially close more doors than it opens new ones, young adults may become too reluctant to commit to any one course of action for fear that some future course of action may be more attractive. Thus, like in the stock market, it is important to young adults to understand as much about when to exercise their options as when to accumulate them. (p. 526)

A counselor can help Brad see that, while closing off options does involve loss, there are gains to be made, including, perhaps, an increased sense of purpose. Counseling can help Brad to develop his own internal standards, which would assist him in working through difficulties with career-related indecisiveness. Brad would benefit from increased insight regarding a dysfunctional pattern he compulsively exercises: he spends hours on the Internet in pursuit of the perfect job, only to become overwhelmed by choice. He disengages from the process, but revisits the cycle again in a counterproductive behavioral pattern. Breaking the behavioral

pattern with alternative job search strategies would in all likelihood improve Brad's chances of identifying and finding a vocational home.

Describing his personal life, Brad says, "It's sort of like a safe harbor. Every day is safe. I am in a routine socially and every other way and I know what is going on. It's stable, quite stable." Brad's choice of words, though perhaps unconscious, may be enlightening here. He finds "safe harbor" in a life where his future is "an open book." On the other hand, making a career choice means that his future will be set in "concrete." Who would choose concrete over open books and safe harbors?

Ariely (2008), author of *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions,* is a behavioral economist who offers insightful observations based on systematic experimental designs that focus on choice selection. He and his Yale colleague, Jiwoong Shin, created computer simulation games to address the conundrum of choice, specifically to study the human tendency to avoid commitment and leave open avenues of escape when presented with multiple options.

What they uncovered was a human tendency, under some conditions, to deal with the anxiety of freedom in ways that tend to be undermining. MIT students, when offered three doors on a screen, could choose any of the three and collect various sums of money in that room by clicking a mouse. The option to switch to a more lucrative room is always present, but comes at the cost of using one of the allotted number of clicks per game. The object of the game is to locate the room with the largest payout and thereby earn the maximum amount of money before the allotted clicks are consumed.

Ariely's research question pondered the strategy of players faced with a limited supply of clicks, which translated to a limited amount of choice. One strategy would allow options to disappear and permit players to collect what financial rewards they can, and the other, to attempt to keep options open, even if it means foregoing a payout in a room still open.

Another modification to the game raised the stakes. Twelve clicks into the game, doors to rooms still unvisited began to vanish. This left many players running from one room to the other in a frantic effort to keep the doors open. This strategy led players become stressed and spend clicks that they could have used to collect more payouts. These players earned far fewer payouts than players who stayed in one room and ignored the lure of the unvisited rooms.

This uneconomical behavior continued in another variation of the game. In this version of the game, Ariely and Shin provided an additional option: the choice to make doors reappear by clicking on the space they had occupied earlier. Even under these conditions, many players still wasted clicks on doors to keep them from vanishing. The authors concluded that, for many players, the discomfort of foreclosed options was worth any price to avoid, even when the greater gain was clearly obtainable at the cost of letting the potentialities go. Clearly, the loss concomitant with choice is a scenario human beings are eager to avoid. The fact that one choice excludes all the rest is an uncomfortable one, and Ariely suggests that the mechanism to address this may be innate. Under certain conditions, the best option, as Ariely points out, is to let go of the alternatives and exercise one

choice. Ariely offers an illustrative fable derived from the French philosopher Jean Buridan to drive this lesson home:

> A hungry donkey approaches a barn one day looking for hay and discovers two haystacks of identical size at the two opposite sides of the barn. The donkey stands in the middle of the barn between the two haystacks, not knowing which to select. Hours go by, but he still can't make up his mind. Unable to decide, the donkey eventually dies of starvation. (p. 151)

Hard-wired though the inclination to protect choice may be, individuals like Brad may benefit from the awareness that timely decisions are sometimes better than collecting potential options that provide comfort. The obsession that an ideal future exists, uninformed by the more mature expectation that every choice entails both rewards and losses, may inform part of the dilemma that emerging and young adults like Brad find themselves in. Perfectionism, when it becomes a focus on an elusive ideal always just over the receding horizon, is a closely related concern.

Perfectionism

In quest of the "perfect job" emerging and young adults can manifest this trait in ways that are adaptive, or maladaptive (Frost et al. 1990; Ganske and Ashby 2007). Adaptive personal standards lead to rewards, enhanced work performance, and a sense of daily well-being. When maladaptive, perfectionism is associated with self-doubt and unreasonably high expectations, especially with reference to perceived expectations of others, and can dim the prospects for job satisfaction (Page et al. 2008; Lehmann and Konstam 2011). Perhaps the least destructive outcome of this maladaptive strategy is career indecision, and a significant correlation can be found between these two terms (Slaney et al. 1995). However, maladaptive perfectionism has also been paired with more dire consequences for health and functioning including eating disorders, depression and anxiety, and fear and avoidance of intimacy (Ashby and Rice 2002; Dibartolo et al. 2008).

The quest for perfectionism and passion is undertaken by emerging and young adults in varying domains, either exclusively in the work domain, or more comprehensively, in the domains of job, attachments, family, and life-style, all at once. This inability to allow for setbacks and approximations across multiple domains opens the emerging and young adult to potential disappointment, angst, and bewilderment when perfection cannot be attained in all domains simultaneously.

Brad's resolutions own a similar tone: one job exists for him to locate and fill; the alternative is merely "settling." This anxiety about approximations, about settling, motivates emerging and young adults not only in our own culture, but in other post-industrial societies, notably Japan. Woods (2005) describes emerging adults in Japan who are ignoring pleas from the job market to replace retiring workers—as in the USA, a rapidly growing segment of the population. The Nomura Research Institute confirms this trend, identifying three-quarters of individuals in their 20s and 30s who express lack of motivation, the inclination to

quit if given the chance, and a general disillusionment with life in the corporation. Furthermore, an estimated 640,000 15–34-year-olds are resolutely refusing to enter the job market. Those not in employment, education or trainings (NEET) have to date ignored structured, government sponsored programs to encourage their entrance into the work force. What is motivating the NEETs?

Many Japanese in their 40s and 50s who sacrificed their lives for stable but grueling corporate jobs do not want their children to do the same. As a result, they are encouraging them to pursue dream jobs—even seemingly unattainable ones—and are willing to support them in the process. Emerging and young adults, too, are tiring of corporate life. Their parents entered a company and stayed there, but their children are looking for more diversity (Woods 2005). Needless to say, Japanese career consultants are not as sanguine about this quest for the "dream job": "Dreams are for when you're asleep…When you're awake, you have to think about reality" (Kudo 2005 as cited by Woods 2005, para 27). In lieu of similar commentary, Japanese CEO Yujun Wakashin is trying to grasp the meaning of the NEET population's rejection of the future Japanese industry and finance had planned for them. In June 2013, Wakashin launched NEET, Inc., and promptly recruited approximately 200 NEETs to work in the areas where they can excel. Rather than attempting to fill pre-existing work opportunities, Wakashin's strategy is to create work that matches the skills of the unemployed, well-educated, skilled, and under-utilized population of emerging adults in Japan. Wakashin asserts: "If we can get everyone to work at what they excel in, we can do great things" (Sekiguchi 2013, para 9).

The Quest for Meaning

Brad wishes to "make a difference" in a highly competitive marketplace that is in flux. He is representative of many emerging adults who are rethinking basic assumptions about the meaning of success. They are seeking lives that provide meaning across life domains, as opposed to the compartmentalization of meaning that may have characterized the lives of previous generations. Critical to many emerging and young adults is having careers that are purpose-driven, especially for those who grew up in relative affluence.

A life appraised as high in meaning is one that is high in purpose, value, and impact. It is dependent on the self-assessment of the individual (Vignoles et al. 2006). Emerging and young adults are identifying meaning as critical to career success, and finding that meaning in life connotes a connection to something larger than the self. A majority of the interviewees alluded to the importance of finding meaningful work. This valuing, the high priority given to a life with purpose, are expressions of intent that may well be inconsistent with the pejorative labels that have been attached to emerging adults (e.g. narcissistic, self-absorbed, and selfish).

Meaning has multiple expressions and can be created across domains, but a commonality of many is the social component: meaning is often identified with the act of giving to others, and provides a satisfaction related to, but not identical, to those most reliably linked with the term "happiness." However they define it, individuals can assess the degree of meaning in their lives, in the same way they can reliably assess the degree of life satisfaction or happiness in their lives. Emerging and young adults are focusing on less materialistic markers of success in their quest for a meaningful and purposeful life. Given current economic realities, the privileging of meaning and purpose, together with a decrease in emphasis on the acquisition of material goods, appears to be a resilient adaptive shift.

Brad: Recreation and The Emerging and Young Adult

Understanding Brad in the act of "play" as an emerging adult shapes and enhances our understanding of Brad the professional at work. Whatever his degree of bewilderment about possible career choices, Brad spends his leisure time in ways that reveal his predilections, with respect to interests and skill sets. Analysis of Brad's leisure activities provides a consistent through-line from his adolescence to emerging adulthood. Playing chess, tutoring, and singing in a choir have supplemented summers as a camp counselor. This last activity could promise much, as Brad seems to have a grasp on what each individual needs to assist in the process of working toward mastery, and intuitively adjusts a curriculum to match the student's learning style. The result of this gift is a more confident learner. During his summers as an adolescent, Brad enjoyed being a camp counselor. He appears to have a gift for teaching and enjoys the process of analyzing what may be getting in the way of individual mastery.

The capacity to self-direct, self-reflect, and be responsible are capacities that assist in the development of careers and career identities. Recreational behavior calls on many of the same attributes that career management does (Jahoda 1981). A sense of well-being promotes the ability to adapt in a career, and as such, leisure activities promote the resilience necessary to go the distance (Jahoda 1981; Celen-Demirtas et al. 2014). Stress impacts work performance, while leisure activities facilitate the management of stress, with a salutary effect on career (Caldwell 2005; Iwasaki 2001; Iwasaki and Mannell 2000). Leisure activities promote health (Brooks and Magnusson 2007; Han and Patterson 2007; Trainor et al. 2010) and contribute to feelings of satisfaction with life (Becchetti et al. 2010). They also contribute to favorable mental health outcomes (Bazyk 2005; Caldwell 2005; Passmore 1998, 2003; Passmore and French 2000), and contribute to resiliency as an individual attempts to weather long periods of unemployment (Winefield et al. 1992; Waters and Moore 2002).

Questions that can add dimension to the intersection of leisure and career include:

- Do individuals *actively pursue* those outside interests and hobbies they are passionate about?
- How suited to the particularities of individuals are they, as opposed to interests of a more generic kind that engage the whole demographic?

- Are these activities social or solitary, and, if social, is the individual an organizer or leader, or the "culture bearer?" Which events evoke these abilities in the individual, and can he or she take direction, as well as direct? How does the individual make opportunities for these activities, as opposed to merely making themselves available?
- Refining the above question, what is the ratio of active to passive activities? For example, playing an instrument versus watching television?
- Does the individual's recreational life involve any specialized skills that can find expression in a career?
- Is the individual creative, with gifts or talents out of the ordinary? Do any genuine gifts or talents reveal themselves in leisure pursuits?
- Do the individual's leisure activities require mastery of a technology?
- How firm are the individual's likes and dislikes?
- Have the individual's interests evolved to become more complex, focused, and appropriate to age? Did this occur naturally?
- Is motivation present in the individual to gain mastery in play, or are they satisfied with a purely recreational level of attainment? (Konstam 2013, pp. 45–46)

There are clues to suggest that Brad *will* develop career momentum, based on his leisure-related behavior. As an adolescent and a young man, Brad successfully completed many projects that involved goal-directed behavior of his own choosing. He showed good planning, responsibility, and follow-through in his recreational activities. As a counseling intervention, it may well be worth to inquire how these skills and values might translate into a more focused approach, and assist Brad in identifying and consolidating a career.

Revisiting Kelly and Lee's Model as Applied to Brad

Kelly and Lee's model provides insights to understanding Brad and his difficulty with identifying and committing to a career. If we can better *understand* the reasons for emerging and young adults' difficulty with career commitment and consolidation, the steps for solving the issues that are hampering the process of career commitment and consolidation become more apparent. There are seeds of solutions in each of the five categories Kelly and Lee identify.

(a) **Lack of self-understanding**. If an emerging or young adult seems to lack self-knowledge, it may be because he has been sheltered or overprotected. Allowing Brad to make some mistakes and grow from them can promote increased comfort with experimentation and movement away from a "safe harbor" that is stymying growth. Addressing parental over-involvement and lack of positive support (issues that will be discussed in chapter nine), if that appears to be relevant, is likely to be helpful. The process of making choices and living with the consequences can be quite instructive. Reflecting on those choices is part of the process.

What choices does Brad have in addition to professional counseling? A sense of direction and self-comprehension can be provided by spiritual work. The administration of personality inventories or assessments of aptitude and interests could be a career counseling supplement, and aid Brad in obtaining a clearer picture of his aspirations, values, and capacities.

New experiences can be powerful stimuli for growth, particularly if there is something at stake, something that challenges emerging and young adults to leave their zone of comfort: time in the military or the Peace Corps, time abroad, or in Outward Bound and similar programs. The Grand Tour was compulsory for centuries of well-healed Europeans and Americans in the past, and the "gap" year is a current manifestation of this important insight. Given his talent and aspirations to make a contribution, Brad may well have an interest in "Teach for America." Not uncommonly, emerging adults express surprise at the new facets of themselves revealed by such "testing" experiences.

(b) **Lack of career information**. The emerging and young adult may be attempting career decision in an information vacuum. The judicious use of a local career counseling center may be in order. In many cases, municipalities operate these centers without fee, and these offices tend to be a fixture of most institutions of higher learning.

(c) **Trait indecisiveness**. A pattern of habitual indecision can be addressed in several ways. In Brad's case, though a habitual pattern may or may not be present, it may be helpful to assist him in identifying areas where he *has* been decisive, a process of identifying exceptions in his decision making narrative. What spurred a decision in the past, and what tactics were used to make it? Parental input may, in some cases, be helpful in this regard.

(d) **Choice anxiety**. An overload of options, as in the Brad's experience, may call for a cost/benefit assessment of the "keeping options open" strategy. Movement toward a career is not irreversible, and a reframing of choice as a "tool" or "process," rather than as a desired end in itself, may free Brad toward positive movement, away from stasis. In such a reframing, mistakes are information gathering exercises, the result of a scouting expedition, and not verdicts on Brad's judgment.

(e) **Disagreement with significant others**. Unaired or unresolved conflict with significant others regarding a career course can cause significant paralysis and indecision in emerging and young adults.

While family counseling may reveal parental disapproval of the career dispositions of their emerging adult, in this case, the manner of its expression is critical. Too much subtlety, for example, may avoid a blowup, but contribute to stasis. On the other hand, parents may need to understand that their opposition needs to be moderated, or even sacrificed, if decisive action is the goal: their emerging and young adults will choose when they can own their own choice, and not sooner. In the process, they may learn valuable lessons about commitment, and gain a measure of clarity and courage about their choices that will see them through the inevitable ups and downs of their new career.

While Brad may be trying to escape the sometimes painful experience of self-reflection that Shulman et al. (2006) and Salamone and Mangicaro (1991) discuss, not every emerging or young adult who wanders or spins his wheels is indecisive, or floundering. Creative vocations, lack of funds, and romantic or relationship interests may have come to the fore, or the individual may be seeking atmospheres for a long-overdue conversation with the self, conversations in which floundering may well be addressed. These realities do not constitute avoidance.

Few emerging and young adults can be expected to escape a supplementary period of analysis, approximation, and perhaps compromise after identifying their career choice. Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise (1996), illustrates how gender, prestige, and social barriers, and attainability, can thin the pool of available career options for most (Creed and Hughes 2012). Rejection, or circumscription of some options, and modification (compromise) with respect to others, is a likely outcome. The unpredictable nature of the current economy, as well as long–term structural changes in the job market necessitate counseling interventions and support that are sensitive to the ebb and flow of compromise and circumscription, and the mismatch of needs, experiences, and skills with what is available. The self-confidence of the emerging and young adult, will in all likelihood, in this challenging atmosphere, require bolstering (Creed and Hughes 2012).

In a study of 130 university students, Creed and Hughes (2012) demonstrated that compromise, though sometimes inevitable, was more distressing in instances where career development strategies were minimal. Further, there was a direct association between compromise and the most negative perceptions of employment. Career strategies were key in easing the discomfort of compromise and affected overall employability. The authors assert that encouraging students to hone their self-presentation skills, including networking and interpersonal skills, to better manage the emotional and career consequences of compromise can be beneficial.

Setting and achieving job goals, according to Creed and Hughes, exist in relationship to self-esteem and identity formation in emerging adults attempting to activate a career. In order to excel in the jobs they want most, emerging and young adults may need counseling interventions that manage the discouragement that attends their quest for employment in a structurally variable and challenging job market. While career culture in the USA has led college-educated emerging adults to survey a wide open and available set of career possibilities, career strategies need to emphasize the needs of the current labor market that Creed and Hughes identify: networking, personal presentation, and specific skills development. Volunteering, based on individual interests, strengths, in conjunction with the needs of the current labor market can be helpful. Konstam, Tomek, Celen_Demeritas, and Sweeney (2014) found that volunteering was associated with re-employment status among unemployed emerging adults.

Guichard et al. (2012) assert that because modern, affluent societies no longer provide a work culture of "established and indisputable references" for emerging adults, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to direct their lives (p. 53). These same societies, however, continue to emphasize work as a functional necessity and formative component of identity development (Guichard et al. 2012). Vocational

choice and career development currently require investment in one's work-related skills, interests, and competencies in context, specifically consideration of its beneficial aspects. In other words, emerging and young adults are not only asking how they can make a contribution, but are also considering the question of what the benefits of their labor to them personally may be. In the context of lack of reciprocal company/employee loyalty, companies are no longer expected to safeguard their employees' career within the organizations (Guichard et al. 2012), and in turn employees are interested in portable skills and organizations that give something back in the short term, rather than long-term developmental career-related experiences.

Guichard et al. (2012) propose that career interventions for emerging adults need to honor the shift in vocational development as a life-designing construct that incorporates and defines personal fundamental values and meaning-making of life experiences. It is helpful to view career development with both shorter- and longer-term vision in mind; whereas Sandberg (2013) suggests both a practical 18-month plan and a long-term dream, Guichard et al. stress that emerging adults must develop some core expectations regarding their futures that allow them to view continuity over the career life-span, erecting a bridge between past and present work experiences.

Successful interventions can follow a constructivist life-design interview model, as proposed by Savickas (1997, 2005), one that emphasizes aspects of subjective identity development, values, interests, and expectations, defines barriers and re-interprets experiences in ways that allow emerging adults to set and achieve future goals (Guichard et al. 2012). Emerging and young adults are called upon to not only continually make progressive choices at all phases of their careers, but to continuously revisit and re-design their work plans to incorporate developing values, new expectations, and an economic context that appears to be perpetually in flux. Achieving work goals is not merely climbing a ladder within an organization; it is a rigorous process that requires self-assessment and strategic planning.

Conclusions

Although some emerging and young adults seem to find a career identity fairly effortlessly, many of them face a longer struggle, marked by false starts and periods of indecision. By understanding what may be affecting their decision process, emerging and young adults can develop strategies to assist in overcoming the presenting hurdles. Moving forward toward career commitment and consolidation in the current work context requires consistent support from those in the emerging and young adult's social network, including parents, friends, and professionals.

The career-related behaviors of emerging and adults need to be viewed with a fresh lens. Professionals working with this population must be careful not to rush to judgment and carefully assess the sources of difficulties, determining whether emerging adults are experimenting or floundering. As career seekers in today's marketplace are faced with a nontraditional work structure and a changing economy, career interventions and support for emerging and young adults are becoming increasingly relevant to overall

well-being. While emerging and young adults are pressured to elect prestigious careers and education, job availability will not meet each individual's needs, skills, and experience. Helping professionals and mentors need to be sensitive to the fact that emerging and young adults may require assistance in maintaining their well-being and career confidence (Creed and Hughes 2012). They also need to be proactive in supporting healthy career development and professional self-esteem.

Much like the career landscape emerging and young adults are trying to navigate, the social and romantic lives of this population are fluid, uncertain, and lacking in clear rules and expectations. The interpersonal lives of the participants, specifically with respect to the developmental tasks of developing and sustaining intimate relationships and friendships are the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter 8
Voices of Emerging and Young Adults:
From the Professional to the Personal

The emergence of flexible options for relocation, redefinition, and prolonged decision making, and a distinct lack of pressure to commit to "settling" into relationships or "settling down" present interesting dynamics and dilemmas for emerging and young adults. Interpersonal boundaries have blurred, and with more versatile rules of engagement in place, the diversity of social expectations, beliefs, and opportunities bring to the surface both a sense of exhilaration and inevitable self-doubt. Straus (2006) has characterized the current social context as fertile ground for social experimentation. There are an abundance of opportunities to mainstream, or, at the very least—to communicate to others—what is most particular about themselves in ways that never existed before: to seek identification with groups and subgroups that emerge from the backdrop of cyberspace (as noted in Chap. 4), and to carry with them a tribal social network that provides tangible and emotional support even as they negotiate new realms of intimacy and work. But for many emerging and young adults, this broad canvas of possibility also presents an endless series of choices that punctuate this already challenging developmental period. It should come as no surprise that some emerge into adulthood haunted about the future, wondering if there will be a place for them there, and uncertain what shape they must take to fill it.

Social improvization and individualism has its advantages. Less constrained by ready-made sociopolitical constructs, Millennials have had the freedom to sculpt independent beliefs regarding important issues such as gay rights, immigration, and race relations. This freedom, however, may render the path to defining their core values more onerous, a path of discovery and independent evaluation, rather than one of conformity to comfortable "truths." The road to identity may own more bends, and therefore a less direct and more unpredictable route will be taken.

Findings by the Pew Research Foundation (2014) suggest that this generation of Millennials, despite being globalized by technology and more open to diversity in comparison to the previous generation, expresses low levels of social

trust that are without precedent. When American Baby Boomers are asked if they believe that most people can be trusted, 40 % respond in the affirmative. In comparison, only 19 % of Millennials believe that most people can be trusted (Pew Research Foundation 2014). Nor are emerging and young adults anchored by traditional lynchpins that classically have defined America's "moral center." Religious and political party affiliations and practices are a noteworthy example. In political terms, most emerging adults declare themselves neither Democrats nor Republicans when asked about their political affiliation; they identify instead as Independents (Pew Research Foundation 2014). In some ways, the different forms that nonalignment can take have left this generation of Millennials unmoored, searching longer and harder for the calm, in the context of seemingly endless rancor of party politics. In the absence of traditional readymade political footholds, Millennials face the possibility of an extended search for core identity in a surround in which all "givens" are subject to individual assessment, all the while navigating the unsteady and unpredictable winds of change.

In speaking about their personal lives, emerging and young adults expressed a diversity of values, attitudes, and expectations. Their narratives were textured and rich, but common threads can be discerned. For a majority of the participants, the development of intimate and social relationships comes only after their primary quest for a satisfying and meaningful career is well underway. Subsequently, some felt their lives engulfed by careers that challenged cherished notions of clearly defined boundaries between work and personal life. Participants tended to value experimentation and diversity in their relationships, and were hesitant to rush into marital commitments.

The previous two chapters focused on the professional lives of the participants, and this chapter looks closely at their interpersonal and social lives. Based on an analysis of the narratives, the following themes emerged: (a) career precedes commitment to a life partner; (b) relationships are fluid and changeable; (c) experimentation is associated with a minimized risk of an unhappy choice, mediated by; (d) a process of negotiation: let's make a deal; (e) the sustaining value of friendships; and (f) philanthropy, and the need to make the world a better place.

Career Preceding Commitment to a Life Partner

The majority of the participants followed a pathway that included "identity-before-intimacy," that is, having one's career in place before launching a long-term committed relationship (Dyk and Adams 1990; Macko and Rubin 2004). "Investment in oneself" frequently translated to investment in one's career (Macko and Rubin 2004, p. 22). Many emerging and young adults are focused on the self as a cohering and developed individual, and they expect the same in a potential partner. The philosophy of finding one's "other half" has moved toward a "one and one make two" philosophy. In seeking a romantic partner that can ultimately help each individual in the couple achieve his/her goals, those goals must first be defined.

Males and females took similar paths with respect to career commitment and consolidation of identity. Women were as likely as men to postpone marriage, and focused their energies in pursuit of career-related goals. Some women in the less affluent cohort followed a path that not only included investment in career, but also simultaneously included investment in their role as single parent.

Career status informed participants' assessment of readiness for marriage. For example, Robert, a 29-year-old MBA student, states:

> First, you evaluate yourself in your job. If you are evaluating whether you need a new career, it is not the time to jump into a relationship. If you hate your job, it is not the time to commit, or buy a house. Be complete as a person before you expand in relationships and family, relationships that lead to marriage.

Mike, a 26-year-old considering a career in urban planning, expresses hesitance about entering a committed relationship likely to lead to marriage. He emphasizes financial resources as a critical variable in determining readiness:

> I feel like I am not ready [for marriage], I feel like I am too young. I would think by the time I figure out what I want to do in my career, I will think about a wife. So, financial status is a big part of this in terms of my view.

John, 28, speaks to the expanding economic opportunities for women that result in marital delay, particularly in a frenetic urban context. He places this observation side by side with his experience as a graduate student in the Midwest:

> People take longer to settle down. [It is] easier for women to get their degrees. A lot more people are focused on their career, which is good. People have less time to focus on their relationships. More of a focus on a career, especially for women. It has become okay. If people focus on careers, it takes them longer to settle down.
> In the Midwest, [where I was a graduate student], people are more integrated with their faith and their church, [and there is] less distraction than in the city. People tend to settle down more quickly. Here [Boston], it is completely different.

Overall, participants expressed mostly traditional goals regarding marriage and children, a finding that is consistent with reports in the literature (Twenge 2006). A preponderance of the participants expected that their spouse or partner would work and assume joint responsibilities for their child(ren). However, there were differences with respect to timing. While a minority of the participants chose to formally commit to one another via marriage by age 25, the majority were single throughout their 20s. With respect to those participants who were married by age 25, one or both of the partners tended to be focused and launched in their career path(s). The age range of 30–35 seemed to be an important developmental marker, albeit a flexible one, a yardstick for determining whether or not participants were launched personally and professionally. For women, the time-honored "biological clock," vis-a-vis the choice to have child(ren), influenced their assessments.

Participants were invested in developing themselves before marriage, developing a narrative in which a sense of themselves as "complete" was possible; investment in the self rendered them capable of making a commitment to another who is also "complete." They tended to view investment in the self as increasing the likelihood of a successful marriage and/or a long-term commitment.

In the domains of education, career, and relationship formation, emerging adults are striving both to juggle a personal/professional balance and to achieve goals they have embraced since adolescence. In an analysis of a longitudinal subsample of 5,693 American adolescents, Messersmith and Schulenberg (2010) found that individuals who had not met their life goals by age 28, but who maintained those goals, "had higher self-efficacy" in those goal domains than "individuals who have disengaged from their life goals" (p. 36). Overall, the researchers conclude that "meeting a goal in an important life domain is related to greater well-being during emerging adulthood" (p. 36). Investment in the self and follow-through with long-term life goals in education, career, and relationships, according to Messersmith and Schulenberg, is linked to a successful transition to adulthood. While emerging adults may struggle to feel like they are making progress in terms of their goals, even in their late 20s it seems more important to them to continue working toward value-based goals than to disengage and "settle."

According to Sheehy (1995), as individuals approach the age of 30, a "dramatic shift" occurs in psychological maturity. Thirty is approached as a milestone for individuals in their twenties, when there is recognition that the "dress rehearsal" is over.

> The breaking point is somewhere around twenty-nine, thirty. There's something about seeing another zero roll up. (Malley, as cited by Sheehy 1995, p. 52)
> Before the shift, men and women feel unable to make clear choices or cope with life's vicissitudes…After the shift, they feel confident enough in their own values to make their own choices and competent enough in life skills to set a course-even if that course clashes with a parent's wishes. (p. 52)

Fluidity in Relationships

Flexibility and fluidity characterized the interpersonal relationships of many of the participants. Just as Coontz (2005) has observed that there is increasing flexibility and fluidity with respect to the institution of marriage, there also appears to be increased fluidity and flexibility in relationships prior to marriage. Participants attached significance to having a satisfying career in place as a backdrop to relationship building, the state of being "complete." Alexis, Marnie, and Raymond spoke to the issue of increased fluidity in relationships. Alexis views the short duration of many relationships not as an accidental byproduct of other factors, but as part of the plan:

> [There is] much more fluidity. There is definitely more of a feeling you can date someone for a while and move on. I don't see that in prior generations. [It probably has something to do with the] post-feminist sexual revolution. No stigma is attached to that, which I think is a good thing.

Marnie notes the absence of religion as a factor:

> [Previously], a lot more pressure came from your religious affiliation. That was the social network that socially controlled things. The social network is much more fluid, so you don't have people telling you what to do.

Raymond sees some of the weight that formerly fell on exclusive, monogamous relationships as being distributed over the social landscape:

> There are so many different kinds of relationships. People can find companionship in so many different ways, without getting married. I have a lot of non-sexual relationships with girls. It depends on the person. They fulfill some kind of need in you. You can get what you want from many people instead of just one. …I wonder if it has something to do with the sexes being more equal, the breakdown of gender roles.

Increased fluidity was in part driven by economic considerations. The marketplace, informed by an information age that redefines existing borders and creates jobs that are mobile, impacts the nature of relationships and the way they are negotiated. Warner (2005) reports that 65 % of women in their 20s state that "it's extremely important to be financially 'set' before they marry, and 82 % [state that it is] unwise for a woman to rely on a marriage for financial security" (p. 22). In addition, commitment to launching a career was viewed by some of the participants as impinging on the time and space needed to nurture intimate long-term commitments.

With increased fluidity comes increased casualness in relationships, a feeling that there is less at stake. In a survey of 57 male and female college students, ages 18–24, Banker et al. (2010) found that emerging adults demonstrate broad diversity in how they labeled and defined sexual partnerships, dating, and committed relationships. The variation in their narratives, the authors concluded, "could mean that young adults have many different ways to define a relationship, or it could mean that they *do not* have clear definitions for their relationships" (p. 177). It becomes clear that fluidity and the increased possibility for casual hook-ups and undefined dating relationships bring with them a level of confusion and uncertainty, but also less pressure to commit to one person or one type of relationship. Ken, a 28-year-old participant, contrasts his experiences with those of his parents:

> My mother's side relied on her parents to find suitable partners, matchmaking. Today they are much more individual. I think a lot go to bars, Internet dating and that sort of stuff. My perception is that they are a lot more casual than people in my parents' generation. Well, I guess there isn't as much social stigma, taboo associated with it. If a guy wants to hook up, there is no stigma. It has to do with cell phone, e-mail, you don't make concrete plans because you can change them 20 min before. [There is] less formal dating. My parents dated more formulaically. They dated one on one, and now it is in groups.

Underlining Ken's experience, researchers report that both emerging adult men and women view "hanging out" as a common practice prior to a committed romantic relationship (Banker et al. 2010). For both religious and non-religious adults, hanging out has replaced formal dating (Taylor et al. 2013). Hanging out does not require a formal invitation (Taylor et al. 2013), while dating in groups takes the social pressure of meeting new people and increases one's chances of finding a desirable romantic partner.

Experimentation Associated with Minimization of Risk

Having a range of interpersonal experiences tended to be valued and viewed by the participants as helpful in defining and consolidating one's identity. Committing to marriage without prior experimentation could be "risky"; experimentation was

associated with mitigation of risk, and participants aspired to an identity that felt coherent and integrated, that allowed for entering a relationship as "complete." Fear of divorce informed views and concerns related to long-term commitment and marriage. As a result, individuals experimented with a range of partners and valued variety in their choice of relationships, in part to ascertain goodness-of-fit with a potential life partner, and, for some, to address concerns related to averting financial loss associated with a poor choice. Ron and Sergio speak to these concerns, and Ron hears a cautionary note in the errors of the prior generation:

> [The] biggest mistake my generation has seen is high divorce rates, making the wrong decision at an early age. They [my generation] want to have fun, not settle down. [They want to] hang out… They're chasing more of a social agenda. Individuals are taking more time and care before they commit to someone in marriage, because of the financial implications.

Sergio seems to know exactly how many relationships he will need to make a decision:

> I would like a few solid relationships, five or six long-term relationships so that I have a good idea of what I like in a woman that I want to marry… I have tried [to be in different relationships], some of which I liked, some of which I did not like, but they have all shaped me as an individual.

Sergio's hope is that by actively experimenting with difference, "people will be happier, more adjusted in our society."

Linda, 27-years old and currently in a Master's program in Fine Arts, expresses a need to explore a variety of relationships with men so that she can better position herself to assess the degree of "balance" between relationships and other domains in her life. Moreover, she expressed skepticism regarding long-term commitment and marriage:

> Almost nobody I know is getting married in their early 20s. Some are in long-term relationships for a while—a few that have been [in long-term relationships] have recently gotten out of them. …I think there is more of the idea, you have to see what is out there before you settle. [You might think] this was my first boyfriend, and I am not sure he is the perfect match, because I have not been with other people. I think some people think of it as the [search for the] perfect man, perfect woman. I think of it as [the search for] someone who would be a good balance for you. …people are more skeptical [regarding] what it means to be with someone your whole life, and they don't trust it. They see marriage as a real compromise, and not in a good way. Sometimes when I see a man pushing a stroller, a young family on the subway, the parents don't seem to be that happy. I don't want to be unhappy. There is a tone that I sense in their relationship that I don't like. I also know a lot of my male friends think girlfriends restrict the coolness and the laid-backness of their friends.

Macko and Rubin (2004) speak to the concerns expressed by the participants, male and female, regarding risk and divorce:

> As a generation, the core story we absorbed about divorce was that it happened most often to couples who married too young, had babies too soon, or just grew up and grew apart. Accordingly, we launched our post-collegiate years armed with a big cultural lesson: The route to marrying the right guy for the right reasons was to focus on ourselves for a while. Unlike past generations of women who married young and assumed they would continue

to grow as individuals alongside their husbands, the women we interviewed came to believe that living on their own terms before walking down the aisle was the best way to ensure that a marriage would last. …It's as if, consciously or unconsciously, we've all been after some kind of Divorce Insurance Policy, and taking control of our own lives—by focusing on our careers, pursuing personal passions, and delaying marriage—seemed the right way to get it. (p. 22)

Emily, a 32-year-old participant, validates this concern:

We see our parents worked so hard. Then they get divorced, never traveled. Why not do these things while you are young? You have strength and energy, and start the career a little bit later. Really be sure about it, and start to have the career a little later and have kids later. Our parents graduated thinking that marriage was the greatest thing. We graduated knowing that half of all marriages end in divorce.

Sheehy (1995) suggests that Emily's perspective, reinforced by many of the participants, appears to be adaptive with respect to marital longevity:

Marrying later and even more selectively also bodes well for their personal security. The one preventive measure against divorce that holds for every generation is this: The older we are when we marry for the first time, the less likely the marriage is to end up on the trash heap. (p. 52)

Emerging and young adults, mindful of the alarming divorce rates associated with their parents' generation, were motivated not to replicate this behavior. In a qualitative study by Konstam et al. (2014), the researchers found that among nine women, ranging in age between 24 and 32 at the time of divorce, both fear of perceived failure and impression management in social and professional circles were leading themes with respect to their divorce experiences. While the interviewees tended to deny that stigma surrounding divorce is still a relevant concern, their actions and beliefs, specifically around their decision to not disclose information about their divorce and fears of how they might be perceived in forums such as Facebook, dating websites, and social networks indicated otherwise. With high expectation of their ability to make good decisions about their futures, many emerging and young adults appear to be on a mission to try to avert failure in their personal lives, or at least the *perception* of failure. One approach to mitigating risk includes discussion, prior to marriage, of roles and responsibilities.

The Process of Negotiation: Let Us Make a Deal

While the pursuit of passion informed work-related behavior, many of the participants framed the search for intimacy with precise forethought and deliberation. For example, Thea, a recently engaged 29-year-old woman working in human resources, states:

I think, in my parents' generation, …a lot of things were assumed, not talked about. In today's generation, there is a lot of conversation, a lot of conversation before one gets into a relationship, a lot of negotiation. I guess, one partner says I need this and this, and the other partner says I need this and this, and they try to mix and match. …It is not just

a relationship where I like you, and you like me. …It is more that it is beneficial to both people… almost like a business relationship, pragmatic.

[Your personal and work life are] interrelated. The priority is career and self-sufficiency, so to make any relationship work, you need to state that upfront. [You choose] people who are similar with similar goals, you give this, you give that, and that is how to make things work.

The benefits [to this approach] are open conversation, sharing everything, nothing is assumed, especially roles. However, the bad part is there is no passion. It is more like a business contract. Very, very few people take risks. More calculated in some ways.

According to Thea, one enters into a contract, a business transaction that will be mutually satisfying and beneficial to both parties. Clarity regarding roles and responsibilities is key to the process of negotiating a long-term relationship. Thea forged ahead in her relationships and became engaged, but only after participating in a difficult negotiation process. The process included rationally and systematically exploring the viability of the relationship, particularly with respect to day-to-day realities.

Emerging and young adults considering a marital commitment, like Thea, seem to be asking "can we make a deal?" A children's rhyme comes to mind: "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes [female name] with a baby carriage." Perhaps the rhyme needs to be reconceived, and certainly qualified, to capture the agendas of many of the participants: "First comes love, then comes the question can we make it together in a marriage, and if so, most likely a baby carriage," may capture the process more accurately. If each member of the couple can agree on how the relationship will work on a day-to-day basis, then marriage may be considered a viable option. Negotiation is built into the process, and is taken quite seriously by both parties. The rules are such that both partners enter the negotiation process in good faith, honoring a process that can lead to resolution of differences.

Alexis, a 30-year-old investment banker who works an average of 80–85 h a week, is currently in a 10-year relationship with a woman who is attempting to build a career in the arts. In the context of a serious and loving relationship, Alexis speaks of their combined priority in ensuring that career goals are met for each individual in the relationship. The goals for Alexis' personal life with her partner are a direct outgrowth of the goals both she and her partner have for their respective careers. In response to a question posed to her by the interviewer regarding long-term goals, Alexis states:

In 10 years, I will still be with my girlfriend, but I'm not sure. …I don't know if we will have kids. We are in a holding pattern on the relationship side. At some point, we will get out of it. Our personal relationship is tied to our careers. Both of us want to get to a career point that we are both happy with. That is why we are in a holding pattern.

Adam, a 34-year-old entrepreneur, talks about the possibility of marriage in the future:

I am single, unfortunately. Eventually, yes, I would like to be married. I wouldn't say tomorrow, when you have had employees, sometimes it does not work out. Made me very careful entering into agreements with people. You don't want to jump into anything that is difficult to undo, you have to do your homework, you have to be careful, there are a lot of steps. You are being foolish, if you don't do the steps, the downside is so bad. … have to minimize your risk because the downside is so bad. You have to have the patience to follow the right steps. You got to find the right person, you got to have the right priorities. It will not happen by chance. [It is] painful to fire someone. You have to have your eyes wide open; it's foolish if you don't. And it's risky, it's so much more risk than you want.

While participants privileged intentionality in finding a partner, many emerging adults neglected to make negotiations when they find that, perhaps by chance, their relationships are *too* comfortable. For these couples, cohabitation and a mutually supportive lifestyle lead the partners to *slide* rather than *decide* their way into marriage. Stanley et al. (2006) found that for many couples "the ambiguity of cohabitation" may lead to marriages that are more likely to result in distress or divorce because these couples may otherwise have *not* decided to marry (p. 503). It is possible that the same fluidity that supports casual relationships and the ability to negotiate also leads to limited practical and social choices when it comes time to make a commitment. Emerging adults maintain values around marriage and having children, but may lose perspective on other options once the decision to cohabit is made (Stanley et al. 2006). Tight financial circumstances and a culture that is more accepting toward cohabitation suggests that many, if not most emerging adult couples "slide" into cohabitation without realizing the sequence of events they have set in motion (Manning and Smock 2005). Despite the fluidity emerging adults experience in their careers and ability it offers to experiment with new locations and personas, relationships for cohabitating young adults seem to stick. Emerging adults need to be mindful that while they may have been aggressive about forging the terms of their relationships, they may have forgotten to write in a plausible exit strategy. Further research efforts are needed to understand this fluid developmental period, specifically how romantic relationships may transition from an "I" to "we" in a changing economic and sociocultural landscape (Shulman and Connolly 2013).

Technology and Its Influence on Relationships

Participants spoke to the issue of technology and its impact on their relationships in interesting and at times contradictory ways. Technology provided emerging and young adults with a new way to sustain relationships in a global world. Access to technology enhanced their ability to regulate affect in relationships, either slowing relationships down or amplifying their intensity. The use of email and the Internet have had a profound influence on the way they negotiate their personal lives. For a more detailed discussion of the impact of technology on emerging adult relationships, please refer to Chap. 4.

Friendships

The majority of the participants considered friendships key to living a balanced, meaningful, and enriching life. Friendship provided stability and support in a highly fluid and mobile work context. Alexis, a high-powered investment banker, speaks of the significance of friendships in her life:

> I think friendships take the place of relationships. You have a network of friends that is more like a family. A network you lean on. People have networks of friends in [different]

cities. I think it is a replacement to the extent you don't choose a more traditional path, getting married and moving along that trajectory. It is an alternative, more blurred boundaries, maybe a focus on a delayed adolescence. Your friends are more important.

Colette, Frank, Sergio, and Christie, all in their mid-to-late-twenties and unmarried, echo the importance of friendships in their lives. Colette conceives of friends as gathered together in a fixed circle:

Friends are very, very important. …Friends and relationships are one and the same. You inherit a group of people you will see at least once a week. …Going back to the mid 90s, it is all about friends.

Frank finds that his distant friends sustain him in adversity:

I definitely lean on my friends a lot. I talk to my friends from college almost every day. We always talk about what gets on our nerves. He lives [across the country] in Los Angeles. Different friends offer different things. I may be relying on them too much.

Sergio sees his generation as owning a greater measure of interpersonal trust than the one previous:

Maybe adults [referring to his parents' generation] have a harder time trusting their friends. People in their 20s and 30s trust their friends. It has to do probably with what they have gone through in their life. Adults have gone through tougher times. Living in a more peaceful time you can have the freedom to trust your friends. It has to do with your experiences.

Carla feels the freedom to be genuine in her circle of friends, a privilege her parents did not enjoy:

I feel very, very close to a lot of my friends. I have great friends. They know everything about me. [It is] very important to me. I'm not sure my parents have that. They have each other. I just have me. I don't know how intimate they are with their friends. It seems that the level of relationship is different with my friends. My parents are into perceptions. They care about what other people think. I know my friends are going to love me no matter what. We share everything with our friends. They are my friends. They will not judge me.

Colette, 26, alludes to television programs which resonate with her day-to-day life experiences. According to Colette, friendships provide the sustenance needed to navigate her emotional and professional life:

It is all about your friends. Even if you have boyfriends, you go out in groups. Are we mimicking the show [How I Met Your Mother]? It is like group dating. For me, going out with all of my friends is more fun. When you go out, it is like a party. Let the good times roll when you go out with your friends. When you go out one on one, it is less fun and more serious. [There is] less pressure to be funny and brilliant in groups. You do not have to monopolize the conversation, the more the merrier. Going out one-on-one can be kind of boring, unless you are in the first stage of a relationship when you think he is wonderful, and then you get past that at two or three months. And then you want to be with all of your friends.

Reflecting this ideology, dating websites have shifted from more traditional profile-based dating sites such as Match and EHarmony to online social clubs such as Grouper, which invites groups of three established friends to meet another

group for a date. Dating apps, such as Tinder, allow users to make snap-decisions about potential dates in their area using one to seven photos and instant messaging only, rather than requiring users to author and analyze extensive personal profiles. Dating and finding romantic partners is trending toward mixing friend groups and first impressions; the intimacy and sometimes awkward conversation of one-on-one dating and match-making no longer appeals to the twenty-somethings who are stretched to make time for relationships across multiple spheres of identity. Keeping it casual takes the pressure off making yet another identity-constructing decision. In speaking about co-ed friendships, Paul speaks to the flexibility, diversity, and variability in his friendships, but expresses doubt about what drives them:

> I do not want to be dependent or commit to one person. A number of guys I know don't want to commit. It is a lot easier to have friends. It may have to do with immaturity and not knowing what they want in their lives.

Social networking and dating sites are most well-known for introducing people and helping friends and acquaintances separated by time and distance to keep in touch. The newest social sites are cultivating the trend of online relationship maintenance by offering tools to keep friends and dating relationships engaged socially. Sites such as "HowAboutWe.com"—which markets as an "offline dating site"—started as matchmaking services, but continue to offer date ideas, relationship advice, and activities for couples once they have committed. It follows that a couple or group of friends that were connected by social media could continue to take advantage of tech support for their relationships.

A minority position expressed by a participant suggests that friendships interfere with commitment to a life partner: "I think it makes things difficult, it keeps people from committing and settling down until later in life." Several of the married men and women expressed regret with respect to not having the time to cultivate their friendships. However, the men did comment on their ability to readily reengage with their friends. Frank, an employer of emerging and young adults, also in his thirties, and married, focused on gender differences and friendships:

> From my own experience and from my male friends, the men tend not to stay in contact as much. They will visit with friends ever so often, and no one is upset about this period of time where there has been this lack of communication. I can pick up with my male friends exactly where I left off. [It] can be once a year or even longer than that, once every several years.
> In my experience the reason the relationship has gone off into the ether is either distance, people not living local anymore, or preoccupation with something else. What re-sparks the communication is usually some common interest that occurs. One of my friends likes wine. I think of the Boston wine expo, call him, hey we should get together. Or you get together, if you are visiting the town they are in. Women are generally in contact more frequently, and if they are not in contact, it is much harder to establish a relationship that has been broken off.

Watters (2006) sees a tribal element in the relationships of Millennials. Tribes are guided by unspoken roles and hierarchies, and tribal members think of themselves as "us," and the rest of the world as "them" (p. 87). The tribe is bonded together, much like a family, and is self-protective, particularly during times

of duress. Members of the "tribe" hold each other responsible for their actions, "tribal behavior does not prove a loss of 'family values.' It is a fresh expression of them" (p. 88).

Watters argues that although tribe membership may delay marriage, it may also enhance the institution of marriage in that it may assist emerging and young adults in understanding what they need in a mate. He concludes:

> What a fantastic twist-we 'never marrieds' may end up revitalizing the very institution we've supposedly been undermining…. Those of us who find it hard to leave our tribes will not choose marriage blithely, as if it is the inevitable next step in our lives, the way middle-class high-school kids choose college. When we go to the altar, we will be sacrificing something precious. In that sacrifice, we may begin to learn to treat our marriages with the reverence they need to survive. (pp. 88–89)

A minority of the men and women, married and/or with children, tended to express regret at not having sufficient opportunity to see their friends. The demands of a family as well as a career interfered with their ability to remain connected, although email and texting provided them with an invaluable tool.

For a minority of the participants, friendships were sacrificed due to very heavy work demands. Chris, a married 32-year-old engineer, laments the fact that he does not have the time to pursue relationships in general, including friendships: "[there is] less commitment to relationships. We're so driven by getting ahead that we sacrifice personal relationships."

Daniel, a 31-year-old, married computer consultant, attributes his nonsocial existence to the fact that he has relocated with his wife to Seattle, and spends most of his workday on the phone, troubleshooting with customers on issues related to technology:

> At the moment, I work from home. I have few social connections. It does not upset me. It is just a way of being for the moment. It is a by-product of my professional arrangement for the moment. There a plenty of things I can do. Like Facebook, log up with people of similar interests. [I] have not felt compelled to do that. That is not to say that at some point I might.

Amanda laments the fact that she does not have time to nurture her friendships. She wishes she could carve out time to have a moment for herself and her friends. Her friendships are suffering due to overwhelming responsibilities at home and at work:

> It's really hard. I don't have much of a personal life. I have so many responsibilities. Sometimes I feel like I don't have a life, like getting together with girlfriends, I just don't do it. There is not enough time. The way I feel right now, I feel like I am really missing out on life. I am working so much, trying to make ends meet for my family. And I don't have any time to do anything else. I'm up very early in the morning and I go to bed late at night. The majority of the time I don't take any time for myself. Maybe I could paint my own nails or something.

Overall, participants in both cohorts tended to view friendships as an important source of sustenance and support, a finding that is reinforced in the literature (Oswald and Clark 2003). Linda, a 26-year-old fine arts student, and Martha, a 28-year-old nursery school teacher and part-time physical trainer and waitress,

speak to the importance of friendships, focusing on the significance of the current environmental context in terms of informing their friendships. Linda values intimacy but knows that it can come with a cost:

> In the previous generation, people were creating family units a little younger. In our generation, we are trying to create families outside of our families. You don't really have the stability of that kind of unconditional support. You want that closeness. Everybody wants to have people that love them no matter what, reserving judgment. We try to do that for each other, me and my friends. [We are living in] unstable environments. No one I know lives in the same town that they grew up in. Many people don't live even in the same state. I think friends want to help each other and take care of each other. They sometimes cross the line in telling you what to do.

Martha appreciates the selectivity that contemporary friendship modes offer her, as measured against process of the traditional family in which one is more or less recruited into the available social context:

> In my family, there is the Catholic guilt. You always look out for your family and your friends even if you don't like them. For the younger people, we have such open communication. Via the Internet, we have such large group of friends. I feel we can be pickier. Kids today don't have a lot of time. I can't be spending time with someone I don't like.
> We did not have time. We were conditioned not to have as much time, whereas they [referring to her parents' generation] played with every Dick, Tom, and Harry in the neighborhood.
> Because our parents drove us to practice, I did not know my friends till I met them. When my parents were kids, they played with kids in the same neighborhood. … [My experiences] taught me to reach out and build a wider net of friends on my own, and my parents made friends with the neighborhood kids. And that adds to the guilt factor. I knew your parents when I was young. That means you have to hang out with them. If I go to school and make friends on my own, I am more self-actualized in terms of what traits I want in a friend. My mother did not have that choice. She has to have friends from a neighborhood. You get told to have friends, as opposed to finding out what you like in a friend.

Participants tended to report increasing differentiation with respect to selection of friends over time, a finding consistent with the literature (Collins and van Dulmen 2006). Adena, a 28-year-old educator, states:

> I think I am looking for longer-term friends these days compared to when I was younger. I seem to get along with people who have similar interests. Before I used to talk to everyone, now I tend to be selective about friendships. Before, I did not know who I wanted to hang out with.

Some researchers have given attention to the shape that friendship assumes temporally, noting that with age, "affiliations with friends, romantic partners, siblings, and parents unfold along varied and somewhat discrete trajectories for most of the second decade of life, then coalesce during the early 20s into an integrated interpersonal structure" (Collins and Laursen 2000, p. 59).

Overall, as the participants above testified, friendships tended to be organized around similar interests and values and an appreciation of the other. Some of the participants reported a greater degree of openness, trust, and intimacy in their relationships with friends as they compared these relationships to those of their parents. In addition, participants observed that friendships were sustained most often due to a

common purpose. Over time, an increasingly important component was identified by the participants: reciprocal support. As Daniel describes below, each individual in the friendship could count on the other for tangible and emotional aid:

> Friendship starts with things in common. They develop from general attraction of personalities, similar to love. I don't know if that has really changed. Friendships formed differently may not be friends. They may be mutually beneficial arrangements, business relationships, but friendship is based on people liking each other.

Philanthropy, Political Commitments, and the Need to Make the World a Better Place

A commitment to philanthropy was evident in a significant minority of the participants. Despite lives that included demanding jobs, commitment to friends, significant others, and/or family, a significant minority of the participants chose to engage in philanthropic volunteer activities. "Giving back to the community" appeared for many to be an internalized mandate. Interestingly, for the many who were *not* engaged in altruistic activities, there was an acknowledgement—and for some, guilt—that they were not "giving back to their community." They tended to view their generation as "philanthropic," although those who strongly identified with the need to give back to their communities commented that they wished that more of their peers would do so. Rachel, a married 27-year-old woman with a demanding career, speaks to the importance of "giving back," and the personal fulfillment she receives:

> I enjoy my life, the things that I do. I really enjoy the volunteer work. I enjoy the people who do the work with me. [She proceeds to list three activities she engages in that are substantive in terms of the mission and scope of her responsibilities, all in the capacity of a volunteer].

Claire, currently working as a press secretary, and previously working as an administrator in mental health, states:

> The most difficult thing for me was leaving the mental health field. There was guilt. …it is almost a sellout. With what I do, I still look at it as helping people. I spend a lot of time with my grandmother at a nursing home, I still have a philanthropic personality. I plan on lobbying for adolescents in need of mental health services at some time in the future.

Raymond, a 27-year-old single male, laments that some of his friends do not appear to share the same philanthropic values he upholds:

> I am always disappointed in how much my peers don't put themselves out there. I put myself out there. I do a lot of things for a lot of people. I honestly think that this is healthy. [Maybe] this is a time they need to focus on themselves, and maybe later they can focus on other people when they are financially in a better place.

Dean and Jeff both feel ambivalent about their peers who are not engaging in philanthropic work. Dean can still see himself mirrored in some of his friends:

> I try to do things that are socially rewarding; I am tutoring to help inner city kids to get into college. I have consistently done that, makes you feel good. I am one of the few

people who does these things. Everyone I know is out for themselves and I am guilty as well. You've got to do what is best for you. We don't know where we are going. How can you get at these answers without thinking about yourself.

Jeff feels dissatisfied with the social limitations of his career choice:

Well I guess I've chosen a very specific task—the Wall Street corporate thing. Caretakers of the earth, giving back to the community, we are probably the least contributors to the community [referring to his Wall Street community]. There are truly amazing people who are doing wonderful and amazing things for others. Working in the Peace Corps. I don't do anything that helps anyone. For every jerk like me, there are other people who do make the world a better place. There are a lot of people who are committed to improving the world we are living in, and they have a lot of great ideas.

Amanda uses her job as a venue for contributing to the world, hoping to have impact on other and contributing to its betterment:

I feel like I am at the tail end of my crisis [referring to her emerging adulthood crisis], figuring out what I want my legacy to be. …I am here for a purpose and I want to do something significant with my life. What did I contribute? For me, that quarter life crisis started with my trying to figure that out. Thinking about my mom, my mom passed away. I mirror what my mom did. People talk to me about my mom. She was a day care person. Everyone who knew her loved her. They have such nice things to say about her. Working with teenage girls who are pregnant, that is what I have committed my days to, wanting to have an impact on someone's life.

Jill, born into wealth, provides tutoring and pro bono tennis lessons, and states:

When you are wealthier, you have more choices: more choices, more expectations, more pressures. Having grown up in an upper class environment… if I don't do something great, I will be a failure because I have been given every opportunity. My parents are philanthropic. It is the values I grew up with. If I don't do it, who will? A lot of my friends are struggling to pay the groceries. Worrying about paying for grocery bills, that puts everything in perspective.

To summarize, a significant minority of the participants in both cohorts demonstrated a desire, if not a commitment, to helping those in need. They spontaneously talked of a need to give something back to their respective communities. Draut (2005) provides statistics that suggests high school and college-age individuals are engaged in more volunteer activity than their elders. Interestingly, however, she concluded that volunteer behavior does not persist over time. While 40 % of high school and college-age individuals reported that they had volunteered within the last year, a statistic that is double that of a decade ago, a closer analysis reveals that context is critical in understanding volunteer and philanthropic behavior. Students in high school and college are 'incentivized' to participate in organized civic activities, in part motivated by the need to strengthen their resumes (p. 203). One third of high schools in the United States require students to do community service to meet graduation requirements. The rate of volunteer activity drops significantly once individuals are no longer in high school or college. Draut (p. 204) suggests that volunteerism is not viewed as a "way to address social or political problems." Despite a "flurry of volunteer behavior, these altruistic behaviors lack 'staying power'" (p. 205). Based on the responses of the participants,

however, a significant minority do indicate a commitment to continued philanthropic activity, despite demanding schedules and competing interests.

Career, schooling, and social engagement, however, have their own costs, and undertaken against a backdrop of developmental change and in an unstable world, present a backlog of sometimes difficult choices that result in stress. The next section examines the possible results of that stress.

Mental Health and Emerging and Young Adults

Revisiting the Landscape

In the context of prevailing uncertainty and unpredictability, high expectations, and few anchors to guide and ground emerging adults, *generation stressed* is struggling to find its way (Twenge 2006). It is not surprising that mental health issues abound during this developmental period; depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and eating disorder prevalence rates have reached epidemic proportions. A 2012 survey by the American Psychological Association (APA) revealed that 19 % of adults, ages 18–33, report having been diagnosed with a depressive disorder, while 12 % report having been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (Jayson 2013). In the 2011 National College Health Assessment, the American College Health Association found that nearly 30 % of college students reported feeling "so depressed that it was difficult to function" at some time in the past year, while 51 % "felt overwhelmed with anxiety" (ACHA-NCHA II 2011). Between 1 and 3 % of adolescent and young adult Americans have been diagnosed with an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (Treasure et al. 2010), with at least 10 % of those experiencing an eating disorder being male (Carlat and Carlos 1991). Depression, anxiety, and disordered eating can also be closely linked to substance abuse, particularly alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco use.

Mental health problems can both intensify and/or decline during this unstable period. In the context of: (a) frequent relationship breakups; (b) pressures to consolidate purposeful, meaningful, and authentic careers; and (c) proclivity toward perfectionism and optimization, the pressure of navigating unchartered and unpredictable waters take their emotional toll. It is interesting that at the heart of anxiety disorders is intolerance of unknown outcomes (Abramowitz 2012). Hence the prevalence rates of mental health issues, specifically anxiety, that emerging and young adults are reporting.

Emerging and young adults recognize that the choices and accompanying decisions before them have significant implications for their professional, romantic, and social lives. Yet the scope and weight of these decisions, in the context of uncertainty and inadequate structural supports, leaves them in an uneasy and vulnerable position. In the presence of adversity, the competencies they bring with them across domains present overwhelming challenges for some. Emerging and young adults in transition are vulnerable to a broad range of psychological difficulties, especially mental health disorders of impulse control and emotional

regulation (Burt and Masten 2010) such as major depressive disorder (MDD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), eating disorders, and substance abuse and addictive disorders. In the presence of adversity, the competencies they bring with them across domains present overwhelming challenges for some, as demonstrated in the case of Daniella described below.

Daniella's Narrative

Growing up in a New England suburb, I viewed myself as a typical kid. I went to public school, played sports, hung out with friends and went to camp in the summer. Perhaps what made me different from my friends at the time, though, was my constant perfectionism and anxiety about where I stood compared to others. In school and sports, I wanted to be the best, and while I always achieved good grades and made the cut for the top tier teams, I was somehow convinced that I was lazy, or not trying hard enough. There always seemed to be someone *better*, *faster*, *smarter*.

By my junior year of high school, I remember believing that I was a failure, despite evidence of success. I began pushing myself even harder, and streamlining my commitments to make sure I could devote as much time and energy as possible to being perfect. I quit my summer job as a camp counselor so I could dedicate my energy to the regional traveling basketball team. I gave up on my drawing and painting—a hobby in which I was mediocre—to put in extra time writing and *re-writing* my homework assignments, and I was determined to get straight As. My friends at school, all honor students like me, made it look so easy. I knew that if I could just keep up with them for now, I might eventually rise to the top. My commitment to success got me through the first half of the year, but looking back now I can see that I was pretty depressed. My energy was running dry, and that only made me feel like more of a failure.

By senior year, I was mentally and emotionally exhausted. My depression was deepening, and it was getting harder to fight the feelings of worthlessness and futility that cast a shadow over everything I was working so hard to win at. By November, the anxiety of college applications and "the future" was making it very hard to maintain the high-functioning mask I had worn for the last two years. It was around that time that several of my teachers recommended that I see the school counselor, who asked whether I would consider seeing a psychiatrist to discuss medications. Despite her best intentions, this only made my anxiety and feelings of failure worse. I blamed myself for giving into bad moods and beat myself up for even hinting to others that I was anxious, sleepless, and worried about how I would handle life after high school. It felt like seeing a *shrink* and taking medication would only confirm that I couldn't' handle my own problems. I promised myself I could rally, and with a little more work and effort, could get through the year.

But things didn't get better. In the spring, with the hype of college admission letters, my grandmother—a mentor and my greatest supporter—passed away. The combination of the grief, depression, and anxiety brought me into despair like I had never known. I wasn't sleeping and was barely able to complete my school work. I desperately wanted to quit my extracurricular activities, but felt such a strong sense of obligation that I forced myself to stay it through. I began to experience full-blown panic attacks, which I suffered privately thinking that my parents would hold me back from going to college if they thought I wasn't normal. On the outside, I was getting through the day, but inside I was on the verge of a complete emotional meltdown. The stress caused unintended weight loss. Although everyone around me was concerned and trying to be supportive, it was all I could do to just finish my senior year and start planning for college in the fall.

After spending the summer in group and individual counseling, I felt that I was able to put some of my life back in order. With a fresh sense of optimism, I was looking forward to attending college in the city. I hoped that a less structured schedule and fewer extracurricular commitments would help me stay in control. Over the course of the first

year, however, I realized that this radically different lifestyle was harder than I imagined. I struggled to balance my academic and social schedule—once again it just seemed so much *easier* for *everyone else.* With the unlimited food in the dining halls and the freedom to party and sleep as much as I wanted, I gained an unhealthy amount of weight. Although I was uncomfortable with the weight gain, I justified it as the "freshman 15" and promised myself that I could get back to the gym, or maybe even join a team.

In retrospect, one of my biggest mistakes in the first two years of college was neglecting to establish a routine or any concrete goals for my college experience. I was so distracted by the constant parade of friends, concerts, political causes, and new coursework to choose from that I easily pushed aside the things that made me depressed and anxious. I put off thinking about what was important to me, or what I might like to do for work. I began neglecting my body by fueling it with caffeine and sweets by day and pizza and alcohol at night. I took pleasure in a lifestyle without so much pressure, and yet felt the constant presence of anxiety bubbling beneath the surface.

By my junior year, the newness of my urban collegiate life style had begun to wear off, and I was not so easily distracted. The old pressures about needing to prepare for the future reemerged—choosing a major, finding an internship, building a network—and I felt that same depression and anxiety I wrestled with as a teenager wrap their claws around my body and spirit.

I liked living in the city, liked my friends, and was involved in some leadership positions; the idea of losing everything as I had in high school, and succumbing to those feelings of worthlessness and failure was too horrible for me to consider. I decided that I needed to do something radically different, and opted to take a semester off and travel to India to volunteer with an NGO that supported education for low-income girls and women.

In some ways, living abroad in such a different political climate was both a growing experience, and a rude awakening. Getting a chance to participate in an international project outside of the demands of school was reshaping my priorities. I questioned where I was in life, and what my values were. I felt anxious and panicked that I had invested so much physical and emotional energy into school and crappy relationships. Where I once felt the pressure to be the best at everything, I now felt pressured to decide what was important to me. I felt paralyzed by the options before me, and at the same time wanted to do it all. It seemed impossible to make choices.

When I got back to the United States, I returned to the city right away and started summer school so that I could complete the semester I missed. Experiencing reverse culture-shock and feeling overwhelmed by internal questioning, I struggled to keep up with the pace of the city. I couldn't understand, at that time, how the trip had changed me, and I struggled to fall back in with my friends. Because I had gained a bit of weight on my trip, on top of the weight I gained in my first year of college, I decided that I could use the summer as an opportunity to get back into sports and fitness. What started then as an attempt to get healthy, quickly spiraled into a full-blown eating disorder.

The intense focus and commitment that fueled my eating disorder helped me avoid the anxiety of figuring out who I was, and what I wanted to do when I graduated. Most of my senior year is a complete blur. I avoided my friends, and structured my life around my classes, my on-campus job and my eating disorder. At the time I knew what I was doing wasn't "right," but I remained convinced that I could just stop whenever I wanted – that I'd just do it until everything else in my life (magically) clicked into place.

After graduation, I landed an administrative level job with the parent organization of the camp I attended as a kid. I expected that taking a job doing something familiar and close to home would allow me more time to make decisions about continuing my education, choosing a career, and finding a place to settle. Rather than feeling the comfort and support I expected from the camp setting, I felt isolated and stuck. There were few adults working there full time, and I spent more time doing paper work and managing

conference calls than working with the kids. I felt under-utilized in my role, and was quickly getting bored and frustrated. As boredom and isolation got to me, the eating disorder took on a more prominent role. By the winter, I couldn't take the slow off-season pace and quit before the end of the year. And then the real panic set in.

I was so caught up in my job and my eating disorder that I didn't have the time to figure anything out in the way I thought I would. None of the places my college friends had moved to seemed like somewhere I wanted to end up. I moved back in with my parents, and got involved with a few part time volunteer projects. Hanging out with friends from high school seemed like a backwards step—I felt socially disconnected and like my life had stagnated. My depression, anxiety, and disordered eating seemed to be competing for my attention, and with no "real life" to focus on, I gave in.

As my symptoms got worse, I ended up seeing a therapist who specialized in treating eating disorders. She referred me to a nutritionist and told me I needed to see my doctor more regularly. I attended all my appointments and did what I was supposed to do, but with no goals for my future in mind, I never fully committed to the treatment. I was losing more weight, and feeling more depressed. I felt worthless for not having a job or "keeping up" with peers from college. My treatment team decided I needed a more structured treatment approach, and eventually I agreed. Though I was resistant, a small part of me knew I needed help. From January until August I was in and out of various levels of treatment, until I finally found a day program that felt right for me. I learned to share what was going on with more people so I had a larger support system. I began to let go of shame, and to accept that I wasn't a failure so long as I continued to work toward a healthier me. For the next year, I was able to work part time and stay committed to my volunteer roles. With support, I was able to think about where I wanted to go in my career, and by the following September was on my way back to the city for graduate school.

Those first few months transitioning back into urban life after my intensive recovery program were really hard. At first I was just exhausted, feeling like I could barely make it through a day, and then I started to feel like I was going to cry all the time. Everything felt overwhelming, but rather than just turning back to the eating disorder, I actually reached out and used my treatment team, my family, and my friends for support. I accepted that taking a low dose medication was helping me stay balanced, and I started to believe that I could actually make an independent adult life work.

A few days before I went home for Thanksgiving break, I felt that magic click I had been waiting on for so long. I wish I could say why or how or what happened, but I woke up one morning and just felt OK. At first I didn't really trust that feeling. I was hopeful it would last, but still fearful that I would wake up the next day and it would be gone. But it didn't go away. As the days kept passing and they turned into months, I started to feel, for the first time in my life, that it was OK to just be me, and take things as I needed to. As I watched many of my friends get married, buy apartments and houses, and have babies, I didn't feel so much panic that my life didn't look like theirs. I'm much more able to live in the gray areas, where I don't know exactly what's going to happen, and still feel like things will work out.

It certainly hasn't been easy. There are a lot of feelings and thoughts that I've been stuffing down for a long time, and untangling them isn't fun. I've had to consider what I want out of my life and my relationships. I have to work at sticking to the values I've developed as a young person making her way in the city. There have been mistakes and backward steps here and there, but I learned how to ask for help when I need it, and keep my feet facing forward.

I used to worry that I might live my whole life battling my anxiety—after all, it's been with me since I can remember. I believed for a long time that there was nothing to life but competition and striving for perfection. The future always seemed grim and exhausting. But now I can say that my life is so much fuller. This year alone, I've become involved with a committee that presents health workshops throughout the city, taken on a fuller

course load, helped one of my friends plan her wedding, met another friend's new baby, started dating my (now!) boyfriend, and dove into the heart of figuring out who I really am.

Daniella, a 29-year-old emerging adult, shared above the tumultuous emotional journey of her early twenties. Vulnerable to depression and anxiety as an adolescent, Daniella's mental health was increasingly impacted by the experiences of emerging adulthood: planning for her future, rallying for success, coping with rapid and sudden changes, and floating between her adolescent and college friendship networks, all the while striving for a sense of purpose. Like many emerging and young adults, Daniella struggled to reach out to the essential supports needed to foster resiliency during this period of change—perhaps reasoning that stress during this stage was normal, or that she should be able to keep up with the perceived success and competency of her peers.

Depressive disorders (including unipolar and bipolar depressive disorders), anxiety disorders (including panic disorder, OCD, phobias and GADs), substance-related and addictive disorders, and eating disorders (including AN, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder) are among the most frequent and impactful diagnoses among emerging and young adults. Through the lens of Daniella's story, the section ahead will examine some of the symptoms emerging and young adults may encounter during this turbulent developmental stage.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a response to the perception of threat (Abramowitz et al. 2012). It serves an important adaptive function in protecting individuals from harm, and, in optimal doses, assists them in achieving their personal best. When emerging and young adults overestimate the degree of perceived threat, the results can be devastating. In a study of 1,000, 16–25-year-olds, Boden et al. (2007) report a 5.85 times higher rate of suicidality among individuals diagnosed with an anxiety disorder than those without (as cited by Odlaug et al. 2010). Anxiety is associated with significant decrease in functioning across social, personal, and work-related domains (APA 2013). Furthermore, individuals diagnosed with anxiety are more vulnerable to periods of reduced productivity and absenteeism from the workplace—a correlation that can particularly impact emerging adults who are new in their careers, or exploring career identity. Interestingly, while anxiety can profoundly affect the lives of emerging and young adults, they are least likely, in comparison to other groups, to seek psychiatric help; only one-third are reported to use mental health services (Suvisaari et al. 2009).

Approximately, 1.6–3 % of Americans over the age of 18 have experienced an anxiety disorder (Kessler et al. 2005). The spectrum of anxiety disorders includes social anxiety, panic disorder, OCD, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and GAD. Research reveals that the most commonly diagnosed anxiety disorder, GAD, has a 90.4 % comorbidity rate with other psychiatric conditions, including alcohol abuse, major depression, and other anxiety disorders such as social anxiety and

panic disorder (Wittchen et al. 1994 as cited by Odlaug et al. 2010). Despite the dangerous potential of anxiety in their lives, it is common for emerging and young adults to link their GAD symptoms to environmental stress (Odlaug et al. 2010).

Daniella explains that she thought the stress and anxiety she experienced as an emerging adult was normal for her age group, but that they also indicated a deficit in her ability to keep up with and outperform her peers. While she does not name her anxiety diagnosis, there is a strong case to be made that Daniella experienced GAD as an adolescent, and that her symptoms were increased by the stressors of emerging adulthood, including academic, social, and professional pressure. The primary defining features of GAD include uncontrollable and pervasive worry, a future orientation with negative biases, and chronic arousal. The individual encounters difficulty concentrating, is irritable and on edge, restless, likely to experience significant tension, easily fatigued, and frequently has a sleeping disturbance.

Uncontrollable catastrophic thinking, paired with a low tolerance for uncertainty are especially challenging for emerging adults, who may make excessive worry-based plans to seek security for their futures—further provoking their anxiety. Furthermore, problems are viewed as threats to well-being accompanied by doubts related to one's problem solving ability and pessimism about problem-solving outcomes (Abramowitz et al. 2012). One can easily imagine how a reciprocal and ongoing loop develops, difficult to eradicate, a loop that reinforces the worry and anxiety resulting from a highly uncertain environmental context. Among emerging adults exploring their autonomy and independence outside of their adolescent homes, pessimism and low self-esteem regarding problem-solving skills may prevent healthy development at this life stage. For Daniella, frequent relocation and experiences that challenged her personal goals and values may have increased her anxious symptoms, as she was constantly having to plan and re-plan for an ever fluctuating future.

It may be that the improvisatory quality of contemporary careers and relationships, for all the benefits they bring, will, at the same time, be paid for in the anxiety that comes with freedom. It is popularly noted that anxiety is a disorder associated with being stuck in the future, while depression is a disorder associated with being stuck in the past. For emerging and young adults, treading water in a period of transition, uncertainty, and seemingly boundless choice, it is not surprising that rumination on past and future might contribute to problematic thinking and behaviors. Many emerging and young adults may find themselves engaged in a life driven by the externals, academic and social demands acquiesced to with an urgency that may not be connected with internal directives. This results in the unwelcomed discovery that they do not have resources at hand to deal with the pressure. Depression can be the result.

Depressive Disorders

MDD is a global mental health concern. MDD is characterized by persistent low-mood, low self-esteem, and lack of interest in activities that were once enjoyed. Individuals experiencing depression may notice a change in sleep patterns,

appetite, decreased energy, poor concentration, difficulty making decisions, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness (APA 2013). The probability of having a major depressive episode within a year-long period is 3–5 % for males and 8–10 % for females (Kessler et al. 2003, as cited in Zarate 2010). In a 2003 survey of over 8,000 men and women aged 17–39, Jonas, Brody, Roper, and Narrow found that the lifetime prevalence rate for experiencing any mood disorder was 11.5 %; the rate for experiencing a major depressive episode was 8.6 and 7.7 % for experiencing severe major depressive episodes (Zarate 2010). Like individuals experiencing anxiety disorders, those experiencing a mood disorder such as MDD endure, or are unable to endure, its devastating consequences. Approximately 15 % of individuals with a mood disorder commit suicide (Bostwick and Pankratz 2000), 90 % of those individuals will have been diagnosed with MDD (Zarate 2010).

Mood disorders of which MDD is only one, can prevent emerging adults from achieving autonomy, academic and career success, and establishing and pursuing meaningful social relationships. MDD has been linked with poor work productivity (Kessler et al. 2006), which can effect life-long academic and professional opportunities for emerging adults establishing themselves in the work force. Dunn and Goodyer (2006) note that with an adolescent onset, MDD experienced by emerging adults persists through the transition into adulthood. Because of the extroverted nature of the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood, individuals experiencing a depressive disorder during this period may find themselves less established and more socially challenged later in adulthood.

For Daniella, depression led to isolation and social withdrawal from her peer group. Feeling misunderstood and displaced, Daniella focused her attention on academic perfection, and the negative coping strategy of disordered eating behaviors. Daniella did not feel she could reach out to others and saw her struggles to find meaningful work and connect with friends as an embarrassment or personal failure. Like many emerging adults, Daniella had set unrealistic, unattainable expectations for herself. Without being able to achieve self-set markers for success, Daniella perceived herself as a failure, and doubted her decision-making and performance abilities throughout the transition into adulthood–leading to increased depressive and anxious symptoms.

Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders

Although Daniella only alludes to potential alcohol and substance abuse in her access to parties and a college lifestyle, she demonstrates how the impact of instability during this developmental period fuels mental illness, and nonoptimal methods of coping. The emerging adulthood years present a window of vulnerability for the onset of binge drinking and alcohol abuse (Masten et al. 2008; Zucker 2006 as cited in Burt and Masten 2010), often encouraged and normalized both in media and social contexts (Reynolds et al. 2010; Sheidow et al. 2012). For many

emerging and young adults substance use is prevalent and often accompanies mental illness (APA 2013; Sheidow et al. 2012). Substance use disorders are characterized by "a pathological pattern of behaviors" related to impaired control, social impairment, and risky use (APA 2013, p. 483); symptoms associated with tolerance and withdrawal are also included.

The proclamation that emerging adulthood is a period of instability and uncertainty is a common thread in the emerging adulthood literature (Arnett 2005; Konstam 2007; Twenge 2006). Arnett (2005) asserts that the disruptions that stem from this instability "may be a source of anxiety and sadness, which could lead to substance use as a method of self-medication" (p. 242). Broadening social contexts contribute to the substance use observed during this developmental period (Stone et al. 2012). As Daniella describes, she was suddenly met with endless party and social opportunities, no longer grounded by the demands of a controlled schedule. The freedom of newfound self-regulation first experienced in emerging adulthood can be difficult to balance for many individuals, and when partnered with other stress or such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, can become a gateway for alcohol and substance abuse. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2013) and Stone et al. (2012), both alcohol and substance use and abuse peak during emerging and young adulthood. As of 2012, 18.9 % of young adults (aged 18–25) experienced substance dependence or abuse (SAMHSA 2013). This age group also experienced a rate of 14.3 % for alcohol dependence and abuse in 2012 (SAMHSA 2013).

The normative rise in alcohol and drug use among emerging and young adults converges with the common life experiences of this age group and compounds the risk (Sheidow et al. 2012). Heavy drinking during this development stage is associated with high-risk activities and detrimental outcomes, such as unprotected sexual behavior, diminished academic performance, physical aggression, and sexual victimization (Wood et al. 2001 as cited in Reynolds et al. 2010). Interestingly, vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse in emerging adulthood is not exclusively impacted by participation in a co-ed college lifestyle; Johnston et al. (2005) found that the annual prevalence for illicit drug use among college students is 36 %, as compared to 39 % for emerging adults not attending college (Reynolds et al. 2010).

With the increase in substance use and the decline in the utilization of mental health services for Millennials, appropriate treatment approaches are critical. Many treatment approaches for substance abuse and dependence have been based on those of adults and adolescents, and they fail to incorporate the complex experiences of emerging and young adults (Sheidow et al. 2012). Daniella's narrative highlights the use of several modes of treatment, yet an overall hindrance to recovery is evident in her feelings of instability. Clark and Unruh (2009) explain that "treatments for this age group must be comprehensive, not only in addressing symptoms, but also in promoting appropriate social roles (e.g., employment, educational outcomes) in order to increase sustainability of treatment gains" (as cited by Sheidow et al. 2012, p. 240).

Eating Disorders

Although classically regarded as impacting adolescents, eating disorders such as AN, bulimia nervosa (BN) and binge eating disorder (BED) affect as many as 24 million people of all ages and genders in the US [The Renfrew Center Foundation for Eating Disorders (TRCFED) 2003 as cited by ANAD 2014].The majority of individuals diagnosed with an eating disorder will experience the onset of their illness between their mid-teens and the age of 30 (Crow 2010). Although there is limited research on the impact of eating disorders in emerging adulthood, the available data suggests that eating disorders are especially relevant to emerging adults. The course of eating disorders for most individuals tends to be longer than other mental illnesses, such as MDD, but not lifelong, as seen with illnesses like schizophrenia (Crow 2010). Long-term follow up studies on individuals diagnosed with AN indicate that after a period of 5–10 years, two-thirds of individuals suffering from the disorder no longer meet diagnostic criteria (Fichter et al. 2006). Only 11 % of individuals with BN still meet the diagnostic criteria 10–15 years following the initiation of treatment (Keel et al. 1999). Ninety-five percent of those experiencing an eating disorder are between the ages of 12 and 25 (SAMHSA, as cited by ANAD 2014). With onset typically in the late years of adolescence, the course of eating disorder and eating disorder-related behaviors may most heavily affect men and women during emerging and young adulthood.

Eating disorders are associated with high mortality and suicide rates (ANAD 2014), substance abuse and substance-related disorders (NED.ORG), and comorbidity with depression and anxiety (e.g., Mangweth et al. 2003; McElroy et al. 2006 as cited by National Eating Disorders Association 2013). Among those diagnosed with an eating disorder, substance-related disorders are four times more likely to occur (Harrop and Marlatt 2010). There is also an elevated risk among those with eating disorders to experience obsessive-compulsive disorder—an illness tied to anxiety (Altman and Shankman 2009). Especially relevant to emerging and young adult women is the potential impact that years of untreated or undiagnosed disordered eating may have on fertility (Crow 2010). Only one in 10 men and women with eating disorders receive treatment, with only 35 % of those individuals who seek help receiving treatment at a specialized eating disorder treatment facility (Noordenbos et al. 2002). Among college students, an estimated 91 % of women have attempted to control their weight through dieting, with 22 % indicating that they have dieted "often" or "always" (Shisslak et al. 1995).

Eating disorders experienced in emerging adulthood may also be linked to increased exposure to media, the near-constant access to technology and popular culture. The ideal female body type portrayed in advertising is naturally possessed by only 5 % of American women. One research outlet found that among 5th through 12th grade girls, 47 % reported wanting to lose weight because of magazine pictures, while 69 % reported that pictures of women in magazines influence their idea of the perfect body shape (Levine 1998 as cited by ANAD 2014). The prevalence and impact of eating disorders is further compounded by near-constant

access to media. Websites and blogs that advertise as "pro-ana" or "pro-mia" are interactive, public resources that target adolescent and emerging adult women especially (Borzekowski et al. 2010). Popular entertainment sites such as Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest are frequently used by individuals experiencing disordered eating compulsions and behaviors to view "thinspiration" content, images, and articles that support an eating disorder-oriented lifestyle. Because disorders such as anorexia and bulimia can be isolating and alienating, many emerging adults already experiencing an eating disorder access pro-ana web content as a means of seeking social support (Curry and Ray 2010). These sites often promote self-harm, extreme dieting behaviors, and obsessive rules for users to commit to in order to prove that they belong in the forum (Borzekowski et al. 2010; Curry and Ray 2010). Access to these sites may overexpose individuals like Daniella to harmful, culturally-infused messages about beauty and desirability, placing emerging adults—who are actively engaged in constructing their identities and pursuing social success—at increased risk for developing an eating disorder (Curry and Ray 2010).

Resiliency and Managing Mental Illness in Emerging Adulthood

Millennials compose a generation marked by resiliency and an extraordinary ability to adapt and redefine themselves in a changing cultural tide. In a 2011 interview with the APA magazine *Monitor on Psychology*, Arnett commented on the resiliency of emerging adults:

> They are very resilient, physically and cognitively and emotionally. Yes, they're struggling, and they're struggling more than people in other age groups in some ways because of their higher unemployment rate, but they also have a lot to draw on in terms of their personal resources. The other crucial thing they have that's important to remember is that they're free, for the most part. One of the distinguishing developmental features of emerging adulthood is that it is this self-focused time when you don't really have anyone else who depends on you. (Price 2011)

Not surprisingly, the greatest source of resiliency in emerging adulthood is stability; though this is a developmental stage marked by change and upheaval, the literature suggests that consistent, optimistic support is the greatest safeguard against mental illness and substance abuse during this time. In their 2002 study, Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, and Milne noted the effects of stable work and positive romantic relationships in predicting "a turn away from antisocial behavior" in emerging adulthood (Burt and Masten 2010, p. 10). Work and academic opportunities as well as strong personal, family, and community relationships tend to correlate with resiliency during the transition into adulthood. Personal qualities such as "planfulness, autonomy, motivation to change" and the "support from adults beyond one's parents" (Burt and Masten 2010, p. 12) also improve resilience in emerging and young adults. In the throws of a transition spanning more than a decade, many

neurobiological, supportive, relational, and individual factors need to be balanced, fostered, experimented with and expanded upon in order for the crises of emerging adulthood to be resolved successfully. Though both vulnerable and resilient, today's emerging adults report feeling more stressed and more depressed than any other contemporary cohort (ACHA 2012).

For Daniella, things "clicked" when she stopped comparing herself to others, developed tolerance for the natural pace of her life, and engaged with the world around her. Instead of trying to live a life of unattainable expectations, paralyzed by the impossibility of decision-making marked by perfectionism, Daniella began to accept that "being the best" was not as important as defining her own values and goals within healthy limits. She traveled abroad to India, volunteered, and with the help of these experiences outside her comfort zones developed the perspective and calm needed to define her values and emerge as an adult. Many of the experiences Daniella found most isolating and anxiety provoking, including a sense of inadequacy and feeling that her identity is in flux, are common for this developmental stage. Developing resiliency, creating networked partnerships with mentors, coworkers, and friends, and ultimately consolidating an identity are milestones of emerging adulthood. Because of a predisposition to depression and anxiety in adolescence, Daniella struggled to manage mental illness in addition to the complex challenges inherent in being a woman in her 20s.

Conclusions

Participants were eloquent as they offered a glimpse of their rich and textured social lives. Common threads emerged to link their stories amid all the complexity of their interpersonal worlds. The majority of the participants followed a pathway that included "identity-before-intimacy," and having a career in place before launching a formal committed relationship. Participants tended to value experimentation and diversity in their relationships, and were hesitant to rush into what they viewed as premature marital commitments. Committing to marriage without prior experimentation could be "risky," and experimentation was associated with mitigation of risk. Participants attached significance to having satisfying careers in place and being "complete." A state of completeness tended to result from an investment in a self that was differentiated through conquest of a long held goal, and the time and effort spent was seen as increasing the likelihood of a successful marriage and/or long-term commitment.

A majority of the participants in both cohorts expressed traditional goals regarding marriage and children. A preponderance of the participants expected that their spouse or partner would work and assume joint responsibilities for their child(ren). However, there was divergence with respect to the timing of marriage. Among the minority of participants who chose to formally commit to one another by age 25, one or both of the partners tended to be focused

and launched on their career path(s). The age range of 30–35 seemed to be an important developmental marker, albeit a flexible one, a yardstick for determining whether or not participants were launched personally and professionally. For women, the biological clock and the choice to have child(ren) influenced their assessments.

Overall, social and personal development for emerging and young adults seems overshadowed both by feelings of uncertainty and permission to explore. For some, this transition is a stressful but exciting period of social chaos and freedom to experiment with values, commitments, and possible selves. However, the experience of being unmoored left many emerging and young adults at risk for a diagnosis of mental illness, substance abuse, and addiction. Increased access to technology has profoundly shaped the way emerging adults connect socially, shaping how friendships and romantic relationships are sought, regulated, and maintained.

Daniella's childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood, like those of many of her peers was pressured and heavily scheduled, in comparison to the days of rambling childhoods as experienced by earlier generations of parents and children. This generation of emerging adults often recalled childhoods full of soccer practice, fencing lessons, ballet, and volunteering at nursing homes into postgraduate work, internships, corporate grunt work, and the struggle, once again—and this time internalized—to be "complete." The overwhelming choice and opportunity presented as unquestionably desirable, appears to be experienced by Daniella and her peers as a crushing weight.

Daniella's story of emerging adulthood reveals a young woman in the process of discovering her own values—with even greater care. Daniella may yet return to the quest for "completeness," but this time with an internal point of reference, an image that she had a hand in drawing herself. In this way, Daniella's struggles were not failures of resilience, but represented the perilous road to resilience that bore her name, one that cannot be imposed from the outside.

This chapter captured the voices of emerging and young adults as they seek resilience in relationships, whether it be in a network of supportive friends or in entering the networks of strangers to offer support. The next chapter discusses the role of parenting during a time in which emerging and young adults are struggling to negotiate the balance of autonomy and support.

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Chapter 9
Parental Voices: "Adjustment Reactions to Children's Adult Life"

Parents of emerging adults are frequently presented in the media as overindulgent, coddling, and overprotective (Konstam 2013) and are privy to advice, solicited and unsolicited. A clinical case analysis of Ben appearing in the March/April 2005 edition of the *Psychotherapy Networker* provides a window to one of the many quandaries parents face as they attempt to adapt to a new set of realities. Ben, a recent college graduate, feels depressed and embarrassed about moving home. He is worried about being "a failure." He has held no job to date, has college loans to repay, and needs his parents to bail him out of credit-card debt. Ben and his parents are seeking family therapy to help with existing tensions at home. David Waters, an invited consultant on the case, poses the following question about what has transpired in the therapy: Are Ben's parents and his therapist, Linda Gordon, "coddling" him? Parents of individuals in their 20s, particularly those who are privileged economically, are facing questions such as the one raised by Waters on a day-to-day basis. Waters (2005) concludes that Ben's family, as well as his therapist, are indeed coddling him:

> I believe that when kids return home … they need to hit a bit of a wall: the situation is different, the rules have changed, and we have to negotiate something substantially different than what we had. It needs to be palpably uncomfortable and strange for a while, lest everyone slip back into the old way of doing things. I often find myself engineering collisions with families in this situation to get to the underlying question of what the new rules need to be, and magnifying, not easing, the discomfort. … I'd have liked her [the therapist] to respond to the family… [and say] what the hell are you doing? (p. 76)

Underlying the discussion related to coddling raised by Waters, is the concern that coddling reinforces irresponsibility, dependence, and that parents may be hampering growth of their "adult" children (advertently or inadvertently). Parents are frequently functioning without an anchor, inventing the wheel without historical precedent. Aquilino (2006) states:

> Tensions and contradictions in the parent-emerging adult relationship result from the child's having adult status in many domains while still dependent on parents in some ways. …most still need some measure of parental support to thrive, which thus creates a

contradiction between society's granting of (legal) adult status and autonomy while economic realities often necessitate a lingering dependency on parents (p. 195).

Clara, a parent participant of a 27-year-old daughter, raises a related issue concerning financial support. Although she perceives her daughter as responsible, she is "conflicted" about financially supporting her daughter's "life experiences":

> I am very conflicted. I don't want her to be spoiled, but I don't want her to miss out on life experiences. My parents would have said, now is the time to earn money and save for your future. You have the rest of your life to have those experiences. Do you say, sure, go to Switzerland, go to London? You will worry about the house and the down payment later?

How do parents navigate in a way that reinforces autonomy, minimizes alienation, and does not compromise possibility for mutually satisfying relationships between parents and their *adult* children? Experience and collective wisdom is sorely lacking given the environmental terrain their adult children are navigating. Ways of parenting that have worked in the past do not seem to apply. The economy has significantly changed the dynamics and parents are in the position of trying to apply old rules to a new ever-fluid economic context, a context that many do not understand and certainly cannot predict.

The economic downtown has wreaked havoc in the lives of both emerging and young adults and their parents. Although the economy is rebounding slowly, it has resulted in heightened risk of unemployment for all adults, but particularly for emerging adults. In May 2013, for example, the unemployment rate for emerging adults (13.2 %) was nearly twice the rate of unemployment in comparison to all age groups (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). As noted in previous chapters, emerging adults are often the employees that are "last hired, first fired" (Qian 2012, p. 2). For those emerging adults who are employed, many are under-functioning and looking for their next job.

Without structural supports and mentoring options to guide and bolster their job seeking efforts, emerging and young adults are emotionally vulnerable and predisposed to lack of time structure, social contacts, collective purpose, and social identity/status (Jahoda 1981). There is consistent data documenting the detrimental impact of unemployment on the mental health of emerging adults including increased risk for developing mental illness (Kuwabara et al. 2007), and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005).

Besides the adverse impact on mental health functioning, the current economic environment, as noted in chapters six and seven, has resulted in challenges to successful career consolidation for emerging adults. As a result, parents are in an unenviable position of having to address these realities in ways that they had not imagined, including providing both financial and emotional support to their emerging adult child at a time in their life that developmentally calls for increasing focus on the self.

Contextual Considerations

As discussed in chapter two, developmental markers have shifted. Normative expectations are less clear and rituals acknowledging developmental markers are lacking. In the past, emerging adulthood was associated with getting married or

being in a long-term committed relationship, having children, and finding a job with stability, promise, and economic independence. Traditionally five milestones have been used to mark the transition to adulthood: completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying and having a child (Henig 2010). The timetable by which these events usually occur has shifted for Millennials compared to earlier generations. "In 1960, 77 % of women and 65 % of men had, by the time they reached 30, passed all five milestones," whereas today the ratio is closer to half of women and one-third of men (Henig 2010, p.1). The anxiety many parents express may require a period of waiting that includes recalibration of developmental timelines. The following statistics provide insight and clarity with respect to this developmental period:

(a) Between 2007–2009, the percentage of 20–34 year olds living with their parents increased to 24 %, as compared to 17 % in 1980 (Qian 2012). For emerging adults between the ages of 20–25, the proportion is even higher with 43 % living at home (Qian 2012). Furthermore, one-third of people in their 20s move at least once a year (Henig 2010).

(b) The majority of emerging and young adults marry and/or commit to a relationship. On average, they have children by age 35. However, they are doing so slightly later in life, as evidenced by the median age of first-time marriages in the U.S. over the past three decades: for men, from 24.7 to 28.1, and for women from 22.0 to 25.9 [U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 as cited by Qian (2012)]. Furthermore, a majority of emerging adults (approximately two-thirds) report having spent some time co-habitating with a romantic partner without being married (Henig 2010).

(c) Seventy-three percent of emerging adults report being satisfied with their current job. Those individuals in their late 20s state that they have found work they want to do for the "long run" (Arnett 2004, p.152). On the other hand, emerging adults change jobs an average of seven times during their 20s (Henig 2010).

Emerging and young adults have fixed costs—rent, college loans, and insurance premiums—all of which are rising faster than wages. Yet, they have expectations for work that are high—"it should be fulfilling, fun, [and] accommodating to a substantial personal life" (Trunk 2005, p. 1). In addition, an overwhelming number of emerging adults feel the need to be passionate about the work they are doing, and are fearful that they will be stuck in dead-end, non-gratifying jobs. Those raised in affluence are anxious about the possibility that they will not be able to replicate the lifestyle of their parents.

Given that many emerging adults are uncertain about their future and are unable to support themselves financially, parents are confronted with a new set of realities that require reassessment and readjustment. Their adult child's room may have been reconfigured into a study or guest room, a move that formally acknowledges that the family is "moving on," seemingly ready to embrace the next phase of the family life cycle. The guest room or study may need to be reconfigured once again, this time into a bedroom, (albeit on a revolving door basis). The family is

faced with the process of re-incorporating their adult child into the family system. The rules are unclear, and family members are frequently ridden with anxiety. The process requires negotiation, and "grappling with these tasks will lead to fundamental change in the nature of parent-child interaction" (Aquilino 2006, p. 196). What is clear is that parents cannot turn the clock back and function under rules that are no longer relevant. They need to parent in ways that match the complexity of the times (Elkind 1988; Aquilino 2006). Many questions surface for parents of emerging and young adults, and they are frequently unsure of how to proceed in their new role:

(a) How do I define my new role? What are my responsibilities? What are my adult child's responsibilities?
(b) How much support—instrumental, emotional, financial—should I provide? How much of a safety net should I provide?
(c) How do I ensure and reinforce mature, responsible, independent behavior in my adult child?

Lack of "strong normative expectations" as well as lack of "strong cultural expectations" regarding how parents and adult children may optimally negotiate this developmental period allow for greater variability as well as greater tensions among parents and their adult children (Aquilino 2006, p. 212). However, many parents also express positive sentiments about their relationship with their adult children who are living at home. In a study by Arnett and Schwab (2013), results indicate that 61 % of parents of 18–29-year-olds are living with their emerging adults; parents expressed mostly positive feelings about the living arrangement, as opposed to only 6 % who felt mostly negative. According to these parents, the benefits of having their emerging adult children living at home with them included feeling emotionally closer to them and having them available to assist with household responsibilities (Arnett and Schwab 2013).

Identified Themes

In this chapter, the findings of interviews conducted with parents of individuals ranging in age from 25 to 35 will be presented. Included will be a discussion of their experiences and the meaning they attribute to their parental role. Thirty parents, all of whom were volunteers located in suburban communities of Boston, were interviewed (a more detailed description of the participants, can be found in Appendix A). Identified themes include: (a) high expectations, paucity of opportunities; (b) negotiation of finances; (c) standing by, letting it be, and letting go; (d) finding balance, the "delicate dance," (d) acceptance of the other, co-creating a "new" relationship; (e) having faith; and (f) solicited advice. First, a discussion of the current environmental context parents are encountering.

High Expectations, Paucity of Opportunities

The expectations of emerging and young adults have increased. While some scholars and mainstream media outlets are critical of a perceived selfishness on the part of Millennials, others have commented that the unique developmental period of emerging adulthood offers an opportunity for thoughtful and important self-focus (Arnett 2010). Emerging adults not only want a fulfilling and well-paying job, they also want to have fun with their friends and enjoy the freedom to try new opportunities. For many emerging adults, they have been told by significant others in their lives (e.g., teachers) that they in fact *can* have it all.

Clara, a parent of a 27-year-old son, speaks to the issue of choice, possibility, and expectations:

> The message is that there is choice and that the world is completely open, and that you can do whatever you want and become whoever you want to be. As opposed to when our generation was in college, the message was that upon graduation you would know exactly what your entire future would look like. …My husband is a perfect example. He was told to be a doctor. He became a dentist. He had so many interests he wanted to pursue, but he did not have the time because going to dental school was a 12-hour a day experience. Now he looks back and he feels he missed out.

Many parents perceived a dissonance between expectations and work opportunities. Janice, a mother of a 26-year-old daughter, speaks of high expectations and the "illusion" of choice:

> A lot of choices, but reduced opportunity. A reduction of opportunities and a sense of a lot of choices. [There is] an illusory sense of there being a lot of choices. [There are] different avenues to consider and yet the jobs are not really there. A lot of fields, but you don't have a sense that there are a lot of careers. …They are not just spoiled and indecisive. The world and shrinking opportunities in the world coupled with high expectations, and just looking for jobs. They are looking for real personal fulfillment. Expect their jobs to do so much for them. It is not just a way of making money. There is a discordancy between reality and expectations. …Children grew up with one set of expectations, expectations about how we live. Expectations are higher than the world can deliver.

Echoing the concerns raised by Janice regarding dissonance between expectations and workplace realities, Brit, a mother of a 29-year-old daughter explains that "there is too much competition, and there are too many of them [emerging and young adults]. The resources have decreased. Even if they are fit, they will have to be fitter. Survival of the fittest." Kevin, a father of a 28-year-old son, supports Brit's assertions:

> Their expectations are that when they get out of school, especially when they studied something specific, that they will be able to get that job. But it is much more difficult than they anticipated. [Employers are] hiring entry-level people for fairly menial jobs. …All the structure is gone.

Both parents and emerging and young adults expressed disappointment related to marketplace opportunities available to individuals in their 20s and 30s. They

expected that the marketplace would embrace them, and value their energy, talent, and credentials. Both emerging adults (with college degrees) and their parents believed that hard work and determination would lead to job procurement. The marketplace did not comply with their expectations. While specific skills were being rewarded (e.g., skills in informational technology), other more general skills that are associated with a Bachelor of Arts degree were undervalued and frequently did not yield employment possibilities. Concordance between parents and emerging and young adults with respect to their views of the work environment was evident. Parents and emerging and young adults tended to view the workplace as insufficient in embracing the potential and actual contributions of emerging and young adults.

Negotiation of Finances

Parents identified management of finances in relationship to their adult child as an ongoing issue. Consistent with reports in the literature, parents expressed confusion and concern regarding economic support to their adult children who are struggling financially. A recent report found that nearly 60 % of parents provide some financial support to their young adult children between the ages of 18–39 who are no longer in school (Goudreau 2011). Furthermore, one in three parents expresses concern that their young adult children are worse off than they were at the same age, blaming the recession, rise in unemployment, and increasing debt (Goudreau 2011). Despite their willingness to help, 61 % of parents report that they received no financial assistance from their parents when they were in their 20s and 42 % of parents identify money as a primary source of conflict between them and their children (Arnett and Schwab 2013). A qualitative study conducted by Hamon (1995) suggests that parents who view children in need, (i.e., divorce), are more inclined to provide money for everyday living expenses, ranging from mortgage payments to attorney fees. Even amongst young adults, between the ages of 30–34, it is fairly common to move back in with their parents following a separation and/or divorce (Qian 2012). Payment for education tends to be less laden with conflict for parents, particularly if parents associate the investment with better work outcomes (Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein 2001).

Parental financial resources determine the degree of assistance they receive from their parents. A 2013 longitudinal study by Cobb-Clark & Gørgens, concluded that emerging and young adults from affluent families are more likely to receive financial support than their disadvantaged peers, such as financial gifts and tuition support. The researchers also found that less affluent emerging and young adults achieved independence (i.e., living on their own, managing finances) sooner than their more affluent peers. An additional consideration is that parents are more likely to assume financial responsibility for educating their children if they hold greater educational aspirations for their children. This is, in part, driven

by a reality that the labor market increasingly favors those individuals with greater education and skills (Hill and Yeung 1999). Rising tuition costs are making it increasingly difficult for parents to foot the bill of their children's college education, with 67 % of high school seniors eliminating certain colleges from their list of possibilities because of their parents' financial constraints (Adams 2013).

Nevertheless, 85 % of parents agree that college is an important investment in their children's future and as a result are inventive in their approaches to supporting their children financially during the college years (Adams 2013). It appears that American parents are willing to finance their adult children if they perceive that they are supporting movement toward autonomy and independence (Steelman and Powell 1991; Aquilino 2006), a finding that was evident in the interviews conducted with parents of emerging and young adults. Michael, a parent of a 30-year-old son, and Ron, a parent of a 27-year-old son, offer a majority position on the matter:

> MICHAEL: It's fine to give them the confidence that if financially they need help you are there, but make it clear only if they have shown that they are responsible. We see kids being irresponsible, and their parents just keep covering their tracks. They need to have a comfort level that they can take some risks and their parents are there to back them. I am comfortable doing it. I don't feel comfortable if they have been irresponsible.
> RON: Financially, you can always ask me for money. If I have it, I would always give it to them. But somehow, they know that it was important that if they have a financial problem, that it is important for them to figure it out on their own.

In defense of a minority position with respect to management and allocation of finances, Sheila, a mother of a 31-year-old daughter, explains that "things are so precarious financially for this country that we do have to sort of be there for them if we can. What else do you have to spend your money on besides your children?"

Parents may confuse being responsible with being independent, and financial indulgence with emotional support (Apter 2001). Responsibility is best taught in the context of emotional support. The following guidelines offered by Apter are apt for these economic times:

(a) Work out the specifics of the source of conflict (financial arrangement) and explain it carefully.
(b) Acknowledge the difficulty and challenge of learning how to manage money, rather than focusing on perceived "irresponsibility" or "immaturity."
(c) Whenever possible, provide opportunities for the emerging adult to suggest possible solutions to the conflict.
(d) Reinforce efforts of autonomy and mastery (pp. 224–237).

Above all, the spirit of the message is critical. It is important to assume a non-blaming stance that reinforces a problem solving approach that is respectful and supportive. The tone of the message conveyed is critical. It is important to determine the intent of the messenger and how the message is being heard. Are adult children hearing the communicated message "you are inadequate," or are they hearing the message "how can we solve this particular issue?"

Standing by, Letting It Be, and Letting Go

Parents allude to the importance of viewing this developmental period not only from their perspectives, but also from the perspective of their adult children. Being empathic and "standing by" are difficult, given that the developmental experiences of parents interviewed differed significantly from those of their children. Peter, a father of a 25-year-old son, offers that "…we don't give young people enough credit. They have been given the freedom to choose. If you give them the freedom [to choose], you have to give them the opportunity to work it out." Kim, based on her experiences with her 26-year-old daughter, elaborates on this perspective:

> It is hard not to be in control and to let them go their own way. You have to shift emotional gears. You need to shift from being in the role of protector and making things happen for them, to standing by. Who is good at it? I think the people who are less overly involved and less intrusive, they have a better perspective. I don't know anyone who is sailing through it. All my friends are having issues.

Parents speak of coming to terms with their adult child, accepting him/her and the "new world" in which they inhabit. Specifically, they acknowledge the difficulty inherent in establishing perspective, particularly given the perception that their children may not be ready or competent to navigate the marketplace. They found it challenging to provide their adult children with the space to be, including the space to make their own choices. In creating the space for their adult children to be, parents may be giving themselves the space to be as well, including the ability to tolerate difference and imperfections in each other (Karen 2001).

Janice, Dorothy, Clara, and Kate speak of the difficulty of letting go of their old ways of being. Janice, a mother of a 26-year-old daughter, acknowledges that parenting at this developmental juncture is a learning process. Dorothy, a mother of a 25-year-old son, speaks to the difficulty of letting go of her "version" of her son.

> JANICE: It is a process. They need to be their own people. We did not give them too much to rebel against. They were comfortable. She is still trying to challenge me, but still seeking approval. She makes choices that I would not naturally approve of, yet comes back for approval.
> DOROTHY: I can hear myself contradicting myself. Fun thing [referring to her son pursuing activities in the service of fun] drives me crazy. Yet it is all right to make a mistake. I have to resolve these contradictory feelings or live with them at any rate. I know it is better for him to find autonomy, better for him to be in charge of who he is. Yet some of his views and activities drive me crazy. That is letting go. I need to let go of my version of him. You go there by finding meaning in your own life. Children can provide some of that meaning but it cannot be that. ….I am not there yet.

In the service of moving on in the relationship, acceptance is integral to the process of co-creating a relationship based on new assumptions. The process of identity exploration and commitment is facilitated when parents provide a secure accepting base from which emerging and young adults can explore and define themselves (Bartle-Haring et al. 2002).

Clara, a mother of a 26-year-old son, and Kate, a mother of a 27-year-old son, affirm the importance of taking a more accepting stance toward their emerging adult children. Clara explains that her currently employed child is working toward

his future, and in the process is bound to make "mistakes." She states: "I need to remind myself that it is important to accept that he made a mistake and move on in the relationship." Kate reinforces Clara's position by explaining that "it is possible to come to terms with the realities [my] son will face and… accept them as a truth, view them in context. …Accept that he makes mistakes, and you move on [by] coming to terms with it."

Parents spoke of the importance of observing what is occurring not only from their perspective, but also from the perspective of their adult children. "As we move away from the tendency to make other people plays in our own internal dramas, we are freer to see them for who they are" (Karen 2001, p. 174). The ability to empathize, "see" and come to terms with "who they are," facilitates the process of acceptance.

For some parents, there exists either an implicit or an explicit reference to the importance of the ability to view existing tensions from multiple perspectives, letting go of the notion of one "correct" perspective, and experiencing empathy for the other. Marie, a mother of a 32-year-old daughter, speaks to the issue of letting go:

> Letting go means allowing yourself to acknowledge how you feel, but understand it in terms of all people involved. It's about realizing that everyone does things for a reason, and if you can put yourself in another's shoes, it's easier to not feel so victimized.

In talking about the process of letting go among college students, Coburn and Treeger (2003) remind us that letting go is critical to the parenting process. Parents revisit issues associated with letting go at key junctures of their child's life:

> Young men and women ask for little more at this time than a steady and rooted home base to return to, just as they had many years ago when they hurried back from their adventures across the playground to find Mom and Dad sitting on the park bench where they left them. To provide this sanctuary and still stay out of the way is an artful balancing act. It requires sensitivity to the often confusing dynamic of separation. (p. 210)

Brit, a mother of a 29-year-old daughter, speaks to the importance of evaluating one's actions and recognizing that parents may be "holding back" their adult children:

> Young people are running around. Everything was structured for them by their parents. It is the first time that they are accountable for their own activities. They were never left alone to play in the sand dunes. They had no coping mechanisms to structure anything for themselves. We never let them do anything on their own. Every child had a mother structuring their day. They could not even play with each other. Once they were out of their structure, they can't do anything, and we wonder why they can't do it. It is hard to let go of that as a parent. …These kids feel like complete failures sometimes. They have not added anything to themselves. …Well, you learn to let go when you know that by not letting go, you are keeping them behind. There are age appropriate behaviors, plus or minus two or three years. You let go when you know you are holding someone back.

Finding Balance, the "Delicate Dance"

> We stumble through it. A fallacy is once they are launched, you don't worry about them. You worry about them more, because you don't have any control over them. You just help them where they are willing to be helped and supported. And you use your instincts about pushing them when they need to be independent. Finding that line between support and

helping, and them being independent, maybe forcing their independence. It is also about life skills. What do you do when you have a car accident? What do you do when the landlord does not return your security deposit…helping them learn to be capable. How do you deal with a bad boss?

(Fran, mother of a 26-year-old son)

Fran assumes that the process of becoming an adult is a gradual one, and that adult children learn best when they perceive their responsibilities to be manageable and within their grasp of competency. Steven, father of a 32-year-old daughter, echoes Fran's concerns related to worrying about one's adult children, implying that balance, understanding, and judgment are needed:

Emotionally, you never let go. You are always involved, connected, worried, concerned. It is just the degree that it occupies your level of consciousness. …Let things flow naturally. [I] don't force interactions, [I] make contact but don't overdo it. [I] don't have lots of expectations, demands.

Debbie, Rona, and Brit also speak of the difficulty in finding balance between fostering adult children's capacities to "lead their own lives," while continuing to provide parental support.

DEBBIE: Communication is huge. Learning how to do enough, how to stay close. And on the other hand, not doing too much. It is a balance. It is hard for parents. You want them to lead their own lives and not be accountable to you for everything. I think it is real important that parents continue to be parents, but the balance. You have to be careful not to step over the lines, the boundaries. …I think just knowing when to be involved, when to ask, when to tell, when not to tell. …I think that it is really hard. Unless it is the laundry of course. They still want you to be that person.
RONA: I vacillate from doing too much and doing enough. I cannot find that happy medium of guiding them that feels mature and responsible, without babying them. … Doing enough to guide them without babying them. Pushing them from behind, rather than pulling them by the hand. Pushing them to fly.
BRIT: Give them slack and be harsh other times. Try to understand their mood swings and honor and appreciate that. Reality checks, keep that in mind. It is a volatile period. You need to be tender and also harsh, like a chemical solution. A little bit of acid, a little bit of alkaline to get a perfect titration. [It is] not stable. That is why it is a lot of work. It changes every day.

I Am not My Adult Child: Co-creating a "New" Relationship

The process of co-creating a new relationship is facilitated by the ability to transcend the moment, and view the larger context. The larger context often includes acknowledgment that statements about one's adult child are not statements about the self. Caroline, a parent of two emerging adult sons, 26- and 29-years-old, states "I did not take responsibility for their strengths as children. [And] I do not take responsibility for their shortcomings as adults." Janice, a mother of a 26-year-old daughter, also spoke to the issue of differentiating one's self from one's adult children:

They have a capacity to grow. They are growing. Whatever worries me now, it is reasonable to presume that they will mature in a way I don't see right now. The mantra, it is them not

me, it is their life. You have to let go of the idea that it is a reflection of you. You want to brag about your kid. They don't own this to you. They do not need to enrich my life, embellish my life. They are not a statement of who I am. They are a statement of who they are.

Marcia (2002) eloquently addresses the quagmire parents of adult children experience. Although he targets his remarks to parents of adolescents, his insightful observations apply to parents of emerging and young adults as well. Marcia argues that while on the one hand parents realize that they need to provide "care, guidance, forbearance, and appreciation," they can also "overdo intimacy," confusing their own issues with the issues of their children. Parents are vulnerable to over identifying with their children, and depending on them for meeting their own unresolved issues and needs:

> On the one hand, [they] need our care, guidance, forbearance, and appreciation. On the other hand, we as adults, need some validation… in our own struggles to achieve and maintain a sense of generativity. …the growers also need to be confirmed in their generativity by the growing. However, we can overdo our intimacy with them, confusing our issues with theirs, and we can undermine our own integrity by identification with and dependency on their meeting our needs for generativity. (p. 204)

Many of the parents interviewed cited the ability to see beyond the immediate and view the larger context as helpful to the process of co-creating a new relationship, including a renegotiation of boundaries and roles. Coburn and Treeger (2003) assert that emerging and young adults may:

> Rebuff parental advice, but they will appreciate acknowledgment of their distress–a listening ear that doesn't judge even if he/she disagrees, a sense of confidence that doesn't crumble when they do, an adult anchor who provides perspective on the predictable but often painful changes that young adults are bound to experience as part of the process. (p. 31)

Michael, a parent of a 30-year-old son, speaks directly to Coburn and Treeger's insights by stating: "Don't be surprised if they ask for your advice, but don't bother taking it." Brit, a mother of a 29-year-old daughter, continues the discussion on boundaries and their significance in the parental relationship with an emerging adult:

> We had to figure out how to interact with each other. If you are not coming home, give me a call. Coming to some understanding that she would call me because she felt like calling me, not because I demanded she call me.

Having Faith

In listening to participants speak about their parenting experiences, "evidenced based" parenting did not seem to be a helpful stance to take vis-à-vis one's adult child. As suggested by Mary, Susan, and Michael, what did seem to facilitate positive interactions was a faith-based parenting approach, having faith in their adult children, regardless, and perhaps in spite of the immediate evidence.

> MARY: Say your child wants to move to Latin America. Although that will give me pause, just sitting back and believing in him helps. I am not in a position to not let him do it. I need to try to get into it, and not interfere and let my worry interfere with his planning. I have to let him go and have faith in him.

SUSAN: I think that she will figure it out. I do have faith that she will figure it out herself. That is not to say it will not be rocky or that she won't stumble. You cannot lead them. There is no other way to do it. They just have to do it. Some of it is personality. My son will ponder, consider all the possibilities, does not get paralyzed. Then he makes a decision and it is his decision. My daughter has a hard time putting a stake in the ground. The underlying basis is that he is sure he is going to be okay, no matter what he decides. He is confident. He thinks he will be happy no matter what he decides. She really doubts herself, doubts whether she is doing the right thing. Does not trust herself the same way he does. Some of it is developmental, they're not integrated. Different parts of themselves that don't fit into an integrated person yet. Life experiences help the integration process.

MICHAEL: If you hang in there, kids go through phases, and if you hang in there, they will work it out. I lost them in their teenage years. They sort of came back to me in their 20s. They are communicating again. That has helped me a lot with my other two kids. I have learned to trust them more. They seem not to need as much help as I thought they would…Have confidence in them. …Back them up, support them, but also allow them to get the independence they need for the rest of their lives.

Parents may expect that at some magical juncture, their adult child will become autonomous and independent. Graduation from college may serve as a marker for parents that their children have crossed the threshold, and are ready to assume a new role marked by adult responsibilities. However, Cairns and Cairns (1994), based on their study of young adults, conclude that it is "misguided" to think that parents can remove themselves from the responsibility of parenting at some "magical" time period. Parents may espouse beliefs that lead them to binary dichotomous thinking: "today a child, tomorrow an adult." More often than not, this belief is coming from a loving place, a place of concern.

According to Cairns and Cairns (1994), emerging adults who experience their parents as highly supportive, are most likely to successfully navigate this developmental period. Many emerging adults are receiving this type of emotional support from their parents, with 73 % of parents of 18–29-year-olds reporting a mostly positive relationship with their children and 56 % of parents reporting that they are in contact with their emerging adult every day or almost every day (Arnett and Schwab 2013).

Apter (2001) suggests that there is a threat that emerging adults may become more isolated and alone. She is particularly concerned about the "shortfall of social capital" and its impact on emerging adults (p. 268). Apter suggests that close family ties and frequent communication can serve as a buffer in terms of the dearth of social capital that is characteristic of the contextual realities emerging and young adults are navigating.

According to Apter, the vision of continued care and responsibility is threatened by "the maturity myth," which denies the need for social capital. Depriving emerging adults of help does not foster "true" independence. To "let them go" just at a time in social history when there are fewer and fewer networks outside the parent/child relationship does not appear to be a reasonable option. Instead, parents must perform that delicate dance between moving close and giving room:

It is mandatory that parents see helping their daughters and sons across the threshold to adulthood as their responsibility. …[This proposal] simply makes use of the love and concern that is already in place. Instead of clinging to our ideals of independence and

maturity, we can respond to our children's needs. If we listen and learn, we can foster their slow-growing spirits. …In so doing, we will establish a richness of relationship that will last a lifetime (p. 268).

Solicited Advice

The following are words of advice conveyed by parents of emerging and young adults:

KATE: You can't tell them what to do. You have to watch them make what you think are mistakes. Don't give feedback unless asked….Create a space for your kids to create their own life, not being over-involved and not being under-involved.

CAROLINE: Build some kind of continuing process for discussion… in your life together. Set up time to explore these issues. Be careful what you say about stressing the importance of finding deep personal satisfaction. Because that is a concern of your 50s, and you have the luxury of thinking about it because you have already been working for 30 years. I have been bitten on the fanny because I have had my children say, mom you've made choices that constrained your earning potential and work hours, in order to be personally happy and satisfied. I want to do that too. But it is too early for them. They basically have reminded me of this repeatedly. They are in search of balance before they are entitled to balance. Young people typically are supposed to be out busting their fannies.

BARBARA: The one thing I wish I could do all over again is help them from a very young age to make decisions independently, age-appropriate decisions. As a mother I wanted to make things better, to fix it, even if it is a minor dilemma. My temperament is a compulsive one. I start suggesting solutions. I analyze the issue that she may or may not have thought about. I am getting better. I now say you will figure it out, but it is an effort. What we have found useful is to ask them to seek the advice of at least one adult that they view as having good judgment, if there is a presenting issue that is difficult to resolve among us. We need to all agree that this adult has good judgment. It diffuses the tension. And it usually leads to good outcomes, but not always.

SUSAN: Try not to be reactive. Do not be reactive to what your kids are doing. Respect the difference, that your child is not you.

PERRY: I found that it was helpful to involve another party when things got very intense. Like a three-legged stool. You need a third leg for balance and perspective. …It helps with the intensity of the conflict.

RALPH: Ultimately it is their life. They will do what they want to do. Don't impose your ideas. Have open communication. Your child may still listen to you. [It is] important not to impose your will.

MAX: You got to let them be their own people, ongoing from the time they are little. When they are little you have more control. If they make mistakes, you have to let that happen, knowing that you can't run interference for them. You have to be in a supportive role. You are not always going to approve of all their choices and that is okay because you are not living their life. They are living their lives for better or for worse.

BETH: You've got to let them make some mistakes. And then you can't say I told you so. You have to stand back and more or less help them understand what they can understand from those mistakes. Guide them through it. You can say so much and then they have to be responsible for making their decisions.

Given that we are living in a time of complexity, complexity in relationships is a natural outgrowth. Acknowledging complexity allows parents and children to view themselves as individuals, capable of experiencing a range of feelings. The

parent adult child relationship frequently calls upon both parent and adult child to engage in the emotional struggle of holding simultaneously contradictory feelings, accessing and expressing the loving aspects of the relationship, without stifling and expressing negative affect. From that place, clarity and growth within the relationship can occur (Karen 2001).

Coming to terms and acceptance of the other, separate yet interconnected, was identified as key to developing and sustaining a gratifying relationship between adult parent and adult child, a finding consistent with the literature (Aquilino 2006). Specific "skill sets" identified by parents of emerging and young adults included mastering the process of "standing by" within a supportive context, finding balance, accepting difference, and having faith. The co-creation of a relationship between two adults that is historically rooted, and requires major shifts in one's roles and responsibilities, is challenging at best.

Conclusions

Parents of emerging and young adults are negotiating new terrain. Given lack of experience with (a) existing environmental contexts, (b) changing developmental markers, (c) lack of clear expectations, and (d) fewer available support networks outside the parent/child relationship, tensions between emerging and young adults and their parents are perhaps inevitable. The anxiety many parents expressed may require a period of waiting that includes recalibration of developmental time lines. "Evidenced based" parenting did not seem to be a helpful stance as experienced by parent participants. What did seem to facilitate positive interactions was a faith-based parenting approach, having faith in their adult children, regardless, and perhaps in spite of the immediate evidence. Coming to terms and acceptance of the other, separate yet interconnected, was identified as key to developing and sustaining a gratifying relationship between adult parent and adult child. The process of co-creating a new relationship was facilitated by the ability to transcend the moment and view the larger context. The next chapter examines the diverse perspectives of an additional major stakeholder, employers of emerging and young adults.

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Chapter 10
Voices of Employers: Overlapping and Disparate Views

Boomer employers are sometimes baffled and express a sense of frustration regarding the values and behaviors that newly hired Millennials bring to the workplace; management of emerging and young adults has become a popular topic in management training seminars. While employers tend to agree that the work terrain has changed, their understanding and recommendations on how to best traverse the new landscape diverged. In a work environment where the rules of engagement are in flux and certitude in short supply, differences in perspective between employer and younger employee bring new tensions to the surface and create possibilities for misunderstanding and resentment.

Focusing on the perspectives of employers, specifically their experiences with emerging and young adults in the work force, 30 employers representing a diversity of fields including, but not limited to, medicine, education, engineering, law, advertising, nursing, marketing, retailing, graphic design, physical therapy, and social service were interviewed. Each of the participants supervised a minimum of five emerging and young adult employees within the past 3 years. (Please refer to appendix A for further description of the sample of employers). In speaking about their experiences as employers of emerging and young adults, common themes emerged. They include: (a) emerging adults as entitled, self-absorbed, and self-focused; (b) the influence of technology on the search for employment and communication within the work setting; (c) the role, desirability, and availability of mentoring; and (d) differences of opinion in how to find a work–home balance. First, a brief summary of the most common descriptors of emerging and young adults in their work contexts.

Prevailing Depictions of Emerging and Young Adults and Their Work Contexts

Despite their diversity, employers were unanimous in their perceptions of the work environment, noting two broad themes: its highly competitive nature, and its general lack of loyalty. Marie, a 59-year-old manager in accounting, and Fran, a 39-year-old manager in advertising, capture the environmental context emerging and young adults are negotiating. Specifically, they speak to the dissolution of the unspoken contract between employer and employee.

> MARIE: The rules have changed and the young get it. The loyalty bond between employer and employee was broken in 2000 forever, and they go wherever is best for them for their careers. … the employers move people around today like assets, and sometimes they don't even know what your skill sets are. They put you where they can use you, need you. Operative word is use. You are a commodity. … I am nothing more than a paid contractor. And … with benefits. That's the difference between a contractor and an employee. I am an employee at will. I just get paid benefits. It is the needs of the corporation, so why should I not go where it is best for me.
> FRAN: Corporations are driven by profit and not by loyalty to employees and [there is] no sense of how companies play a role in culture. Companies change direction all the time, pursuing financial gain, not looking at the big picture. Things are supposed to be more certain if you work hard. Things are supposed to fall into place. That rule is not working.

In addition, several employers noted that emerging and young adults face a marketplace with fewer opportunities due to a changing economic environment. Their Boomer elders are hanging on to their jobs, confounded by mutual fund retirement losses that have yet to be recouped. Many Boomer employers no longer view retirement by age 65 a viable option; others such as Denise, speak of their ability to work beyond the retirement age of 65.

> They [emerging and young adults] have their challenges. Every generation has different challenges, getting appropriate work opportunities. Us Baby Boomers are not letting go over our power in the work force. … They have been brought up thinking they can do anything, and then they look for a job, and meet limitations. As long as I can talk, I can work, thus minimizing opportunities for a younger person. We can do what we can do, and we are holding onto our power. We are looking at retirement in a different way.

Tom, a 54-year-old manager and co-owner of a public relations firm, agrees with Denise in terms of the economic component, and adds an identity factor in his analysis of the issue:

> I don't think we are getting out of the pipeline when we should get out. People are working in their 60s and don't want to give up their jobs. I think it is part economics. In our generation, it is an identity factor. People have to identify in a way by the work they have. Some of it is security. It is an identification of who you are.

Employers communicated the complexity of the situation facing emerging and young adults in the work force. They observed delays in the actualization of career paths, stating that the developmental shift to adulthood occurred approximately at age 30, observations that were confirmed by emerging and young adult

participants. Jenine, an employer working in marketing, and Harvey, an employer of chemical engineers, spoke of the significance of age 30 as a developmental marker. They both noted that emerging adults, as they approach the age of 30, become more focused in their work style and intentional about their careers. Jenine observes: "I have to say this, some of them … [as] they get to a 30-year marker, they start to reassess. You don't see that in their 20s. They are still evaluating the situation." Harvey adds, "In their 30s, [they] are beginning to put pressures [on themselves]. More relaxed in their 20s, and then there are pressures once they hit the big 3-0."

While most employers viewed emerging and young adults as bright and hard-working, (particularly when given praise and appreciation), they also described them as impatient, entitled, and not willing to invest the necessary time and energy required for advancement. The prevailing descriptors included: bright and knowledgeable, tolerant, open, flexible, experimental, adventurous, passionate, acquisitive, arrogant, rushed, disrespectful of hierarchy, materialistic, mobile, self-focused, and having a low tolerance for frustration.

The strengths of emerging adults did not go unappreciated by employers. They overwhelmingly tended to view them as intelligent and flexible. However, while intellectually adept, many noted that emerging adults did not bring valued skill sets to the work place. Their educational experiences, particularly those of individuals grounded in the liberal arts, were not viewed as synchronous with the needs of the marketplace. There is a tension between the values that many Millennials were taught when they were growing up and the harsh reality of what the "real world" expects from them.

Many emerging and young adults, as noted in previous chapters, grew up with parents who told them that they could do and be anything they wanted. When faced with the prospect of choosing a college major, they followed their passions, and pursued majors that interested them. Some are finding themselves in the position of being unprepared and unqualified for the jobs that are available. A 2012 "talent shortage" survey found that skilled trades, engineers, and information technology positions are the three most difficult positions for companies to fill, and that as a result, there are thousands of vacant jobs with no applicants available for hire (ManpowerGroup 2012). In referring to emerging and young adults, business owner Tom remarks:

> They are seen as somewhat disposable. I think they are also seen as not particularly ready for positions that are above them. … The reality is when you go knocking on the door, they don't necessarily need an art historian. … I don't think it is their fault. They misunderstand what college is about. You need to be able to network with people to figure out what you want to do. Not only about going to class. Colleges need to respond to that. The fact that you love English is wonderful. What do you want to do with this? I don't think this aspect of work is built into college early on. Besides liking this, you need to think about how you will be able to use this in life. Look at how the world is changing, need to have some structure that will relate to the world of work. If you have an interest in international finance, get experiences that will relate. 'History of Women' is a great course, but I don't think there is enough consideration given to this. There ought to be, if not a four year plan, a two year plan.

There is another dynamic at play that may help to explain Tom's concerns. Employers are increasingly privileging the learning ability of their employees, that is their "ability to put together disparate bits of information" on demand, as the need emerges (Friedman 2014, para. 3). They are interested in employees' capacity to solve problems, using their leadership skills when appropriate, and having sufficient humility to know when to take a back seat and relinquish power if a fellow employee has a better solution to the presenting problem. Employers are looking beyond traditional metrics such as GPA, and are devising metrics that will predict on-the-job skills such as flexibility, humility, leadership, and know-how within a context of a team of fellow employees:

> The world only cares about—and pays off on—what you can do with what you know (and it doesn't care how you learned it). And in an age when innovation is increasingly a group endeavor, it also cares about a lot of soft skills – leadership, humility, collaboration, adaptability, and loving to learn and relearn. (Friedman, 2014, para. 10)

Not only are Millennials more diverse in terms of ethnic and racial background compared to previous generations, but they also exhibit a greater tolerance of others and "embrace multiple modes of self-expression" (Pew Research Center 2010, para. 4). Employers noted the sense of ease and comfort with diversity displayed by emerging and young adults, a finding confirmed in the literature (Twenge 2006). Overwhelmingly, employers characterized emerging and young adults as respectful of others across race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability. From a manager's perspective, Tom adds, "I think they are extraordinarily tolerant of alternate lifestyles, not a big deal if you are gay, transsexual, not a big deal." Derek, a supervisor at a human services agency, amplifies Tom's perspective:

> We are in a transition stage. Their perspectives on race, class, and disability [are] different from previous generations. It does not mean that there are no problems. It is very different interpersonally. … Now there are problems with smaller systems. They marry between races, cultures, it is much more accepted. It causes problems for the older members of the society.

Carmen, a director of human resources, and Alisa, a 42-year-old education supervisor, spoke of the materialistic, acquisitive behavior they observed in emerging and young adult employees, a point of view that was reinforced by emerging and young adult participants. Carmen speaks of an inability to sacrifice and defer gratification:

> One of the things I notice, this new group wants to maintain a very new car, hefty car payments, [they] want the bells and whistles. Sacrifice factor is not there. I am not going to give up my nice car. The expectation to have it all is higher. I'm not going to give up these nice things that I am used to.
> There is just one person [at work] that has the discipline to save anything. The rest of them are operating by the seat of their pants doing what they want. [It is] curious to me that they do not want to give up anything and they are determined to not give anything up. We had a young man from China, 25-30 years of age. The same group of people could not understand why he needed to pay for a car, TV, etc. He was not raised with debt. It does not even feel normal to them when people sacrifice. They could not understand why he was doing it. Getting a car payment, it is the American way. … His clunker would break down, he would ask them for a ride and they would start to get annoyed.

Alisa sources the materialism of society as a whole as the problem:

> The materialism is a very sad part of our society. The amount they need! Living for today, not being able to defer gratification. I have to have this today. I may not be here tomorrow. Everything could change so I might as well spend it all, get it all, experience it all now.

In the context of a materialistic society, a minority of employers depicted emerging and young adults as concerned with not being able to replicate or surpass their parents' lifestyle. From a supervisor's perspective, Alisa reflects:

> In the past, it used to be, I can exceed what my parents had. [It is] hard for them to envision this. They cannot afford to live where they grew up. There is much more competition out there. Sometimes competition can breed passivity. People who are not confident retreat. If I don't try, I can't lose.

Kim, a 62-year-old employer in the automobile industry, speaks of these concerns and brings a historical perspective to the discussion: "They [emerging and young adults] do not remember their parents struggling. They think they had it all and want from work what their parents are articulating in their 50s, not what they were articulating in their 20s."

On the other hand, there is research to support that many emerging adults are facing significant financial difficulties, exacerbated by exorbitant college tuition bills that have resulted in accrual of significant college debt. In a survey conducted by Arnett (2012), more than a third of the respondents expressed that they did not have enough financial support to receive the education that they need in order to be successful, a percentage that is even higher for minorities. Furthermore, many emerging adults are juggling the responsibilities of both school and work; 84 % of part-time students and 70 % of full-time students in Arnett's survey reported that they were also employed. For many Millennials, monetary success was not the most important factor when pursuing a career; they privileged and sought jobs that they would enjoy or that would enable them to make a contribution to the world.

Some employers noted a difference in attitude toward hierarchy in the work environment. The corporate structure to which companies have traditionally adhered is not as relevant to Millennials, who have been raised to ask questions, think critically, question authority, and internalize democratic values. Sandberg (2013) comments on these expectations in flux by suggesting that employees would be better off if they approached their career progression as a "jungle gym" in contrast to the more traditional career ladder (p. 53). As employees are less inclined to stay with the same company for a majority of their careers, it becomes less important to "pay one's dues" and focus solely on internal promotions. Brad, a 62-year-old manager at a social service agency states:

> Most [emerging and young adults] don't really expect there to be a hierarchy in the same way that there was. They expect you to have a work relationship with them. And if you don't have one, they are gone. Thirty years ago, there was a thing called frustration tolerance, but that does not exist anymore. If you had less opportunity, you did not make the shift [referring to his generation in a context of greater job scarcity]. So losing the job was a real problem. This is much less the case now.

A majority of employers commented on emerging and young adults' propensity to change job settings frequently (every year or two), represented in the following comment by Alisa, who supervises teachers in an urban school setting:

> There is more jumping around from job to job. They probably are more apt to take risks. [On the other hand], people are getting married later and have less responsibility than in the past, [so] that they can do those things. There is a lot of creativity and experimentation and that is good. Even though they are struggling more, [it is] better in some sense than pigeonholing yourself too soon.

Juanita, a 31-year-old nursing supervisor, sees the downside of this type of flexibility:

> They are all going to leave, they will be good and they won't stay. Everybody does it, [they] move around a lot. It is not like in the past where people looked down at it.
> I think that although people are looking out for themselves and what employers can do for them, they also need to consider what they can give back. Their employers are investing a lot to train them and they need to consider that they should give something back before they move on.

Emerging adults are more likely to engage in job surfing and less likely to have a concrete career/life vision in comparison to older employees (Chao and Gardner 2007). For example, on average, emerging adults have been employed in seven different jobs during their 20s, more job changes than in any other developmental period (Henig 2010). Increased employee mobility creates difficulties for some organizations. Juanita speaks of recent strategies developed by her organization to address high turnover rates. She notes that although a significant amount of money and effort is being expended on training in her organization, turnover remains an issue. According to Juanita, the expense of training personnel and not being able to reap the rewards are problematic from an organizational and fiscal perspective:

> We are telling them how important training is, and what we are giving them, and that we expect them to stay for a minimum of two years. We don't know if it is working, [we] just started it. To have them understand, you would not be getting this [next] job, if it were not for us. [We hope this will encourage them] to stay a little bit longer and repay that debt. I hope it will work. It is our hope that they will stay longer.

Fran, an advertising manager, notes that the shift toward changing jobs more frequently, in some cases, appears to be unplanned and unfocused:

> There is a great deal of luck that some of these kids capitalize on. They fall into things. In being flexible, they sometimes hit the jackpot. It is not what they planned to do in going to school. There is lots of opportunity. Sometimes you get lucky. It is not because it was scripted and planned. It is not because they were focused and had a long-term plan. It is almost falling into things. … By not having a long-term plan, they had the flexibility that brought them around to that. I am not saying they are passive. They were adventurous, taking chances, trying new things. I don't know if the workforce will incorporate it. It is not a grand scheme of 'how to'.

Fran is describing a pattern whereby emerging and young adults "try out" jobs to obtain a greater sense of themselves in terms of their talents and skills. According to Fran, it remains unclear whether the strategy of moving from job to job on a yearly or biyearly basis is an optimal strategy.

As discussed in Chaps. 6 and 7, greater clarity and understanding is needed regarding the processes by which emerging and young adults negotiate their career paths, including understanding of adaptive and nonadaptive strategies. While some emerging and young adults navigate their career paths by actively experimenting and searching for a good fit, others appear to be floundering, particularly in the context of experimenting in low-paying and low-skilled random jobs that do not appear to be informed by purposefulness and/or planfulness.

The key, according to Schneider and Stevenson (1999) (as cited in Hamilton and Hamilton 2006), is to understand how to best position emerging and young adults to "make choices that will leave them with more good choices to make in the future rather than with narrowed and unrewarding options" (p. 273). It is important to differentiate purposeful and directed behavior from premature foreclosure of options (Hamilton and Hamilton 2006). As discussed in Chap. 5, it may be helpful for emerging adults to consider the benefits of "satisficing"—a concept originally used in economics that has been used to explain why "having it all" may be neither realistic nor necessary given the choices emerging and young adults are presented with, coupled with pressure and anxiety to make the "right" choice (Schwartz 2004). A thoughtful approach is needed to address this important issue (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Blustein et al. 2000).

Entitled, Self-focused, or Self-concerned?

Employers alluded to entitlement as a problematic issue, specifically in relationship to the supervision of emerging and young adults. While many employers tended to contextualize feelings of entitlement, others tended to link entitlement with a self-orientation, a "what can you do for me orientation," that may be in conflict with the needs of an organization. Denise and Diane, supervisors of physical therapists and sales personnel, respectively, capture the complexity of the observations related to entitlement with respect to emerging and young adults:

> DENISE: They have [this] feeling I am owed this. I have to have this. I deserve this. I don't have to work hard for it. [On the other hand], they have a hell of a world to deal with. It is very complex. I see a lot of wonderful people out there and that gives me hope.

Diane seems equally sympathetic:

> They are somewhat more entitled. They expect more out of life, more out of relationships. We elevated the standards as parents for the life we wanted our children to have. We wanted our children to be better off than we were emotionally, economically, but the difference is that we had more resources and more options especially as women.

Marnie, a director of pupil personnel services in an urban school system, speaks of a "me generation." However, her observations are grounded and informed by a broader context:

> Employees, they want to know what the job can do for them, versus how can they get this job. They had it a little easier than when we were younger. Parents protecting them

more, but in a lot of ways the world is more stressful. Maybe it is a combination of, *we don't know what tomorrow will bring*. … This generation is definitely more about me. What can this job do for me? What is in it for me? They do not feel a need to be pinned down, pigeonholed. I am going to have my fun now, travel, relationships, and then I will be tied down to all these things, and that is acceptable. Now we kind of encourage people to take some time off because we are afraid that it won't last. In a way, we have encouraged delaying choices, because we have seen so many not work out. …So many divorces, people our age get into careers they don't like. We brought up kids to be less and less responsible, so they feel they need [a] longer [time] to be responsible.

An article appearing in TIME magazine titled "The ME ME ME Generation," echoes the concerns raised by Marnie and reinforces pejorative stereotypes that are associated with this generation of emerging adults (Stein 2013). Stein characterizes Millennials as "the most threatening and exciting generation since the Baby Boomers… not because they're trying to take over the Establishment, but because they're growing up without one" (para. 4). Both Marnie and Stein reflect on the rampant narcissism and entitlement found in the Millennial work ethic, with Stein retorting "if you want to sell seminars to middle agers, make them about how to deal with young employees who email the CEO directly and beg off projects they find boring. (para. 7)." At the same time, Stein summarizes that emerging and young adults are also "earnest and optimistic" and "embrace the system"; as a generation they "have no leaders" but also want "constant approval" (para. 27).

Although employers described similar entitled patterns of behavior, they attached different meaning to the behavior they described. For example, Carmen acknowledged that some workplace behaviors appear to be entitled, but also suggests that this stance may be understood in the context of negotiating a difficult marketplace. The anxiety that many emerging and young adult workers carry with them since the economic downturn is even higher for recent college graduates who tend to be "last hired, first fired" (Qian 2012). While some employers lament the lack of loyalty, there are many emerging and young adults who would claim that it is the companies for whom they work who are modeling questionable fidelity. "Blustering through," as Carmen frames it, may be adaptive, given the complexity and challenges of the times:

> I think they are looking to find what will satisfy them, rather than going into a prescribed career, prescribed life. [However], I also see in the workplace entitlement that has not been earned yet. Part of the nature of the 20s [is thinking you know everything]. I thought I knew everything. Maybe you cannot make it through your 20 s unless you think you know everything. Maybe you have to bluster your way. If you don't, you get buried by how scary it is…It just takes some sheer courage to make it through.

Tom views entitlement as driven in part by unmet expectations. He concludes that "self-concern" is triggered by a work environment that is difficult to negotiate: "I think they are self-concerned, not self-absorbed. [They are struggling with] how come their life is not turning out the way they thought it would be, the way it is supposed to be."

Cathy, a supervisor in the field of publishing, views entitlement as a self-protective stance and links it with arrogance and "specialness":

Essentially, they have more of an arrogance about their position. If the company does not treat them right, does not give them their vacation, then who cares. They can get their job from somewhere else. …Some of them experienced, in their personal life, parents getting laid off, and then also some of their college education reinforced the fact that *you are more special than other people*.

In summary, employers alluded to entitled behavior on the part of many emerging and young adults. While some employers tended to view entitled behavior in a broader historical and sociological context, perhaps informed by their experiences as parents, others spoke of entitlement as a "what can you do for me orientation," an orientation that tended to conflict with the prevailing organizational culture.

Technology and Its Influence

Employers took special notice of technology, first, in its ability to change the dynamics of procuring and maintaining employment. Gone are the days of stuffing resumes and mailing them to dozens of companies. The Internet provides a forum for emerging and young adults to engage with the search process in a way that allows for greater mobility, freedom, and choices. Websites such as Monster and Idealist.org not only post open positions online, but also provide a wealth of information on industry trends, average salaries, and company history. Emerging and young adults can search for new jobs "24/7" across a wide range of geographical possibilities, as suggested by Brad and Mark, employers of emerging and young adults in the fields of biomedical research and social service, respectively. Brad notes:

What is particular to the current era is the enormous fluidity that has been created in communications, especially the Internet. Young people can look for a job, explore jobs online, and really pursue a job 24/7. They can explore the different options in much greater breadth and depth. So that they can really understand the numerator and the denominator for job options in the way they never could before. The denominator is the total sum of all jobs they might be potentially interested in, informational seeing of the lay of the land, understanding what the scope is and the numerator is what the actual job options are at any given point in time.
There is also an interactive element to the denominator as the young person explores job opportunities on the Internet, there is an interactive component. They may learn about hybrid opportunities that they never knew existed.

Mark observes that the aura of mobility has a quantitative element:

People don't feel that the job they have now is the job they will have later. The letter of commitment is different from 20 years ago. You can figure out what jobs are available in Seattle, San Francisco, or London, without a problem. The number of possibilities [is] so much greater in terms of decisions. So it changes the whole paradigm.

Both Brad and Mark associate access to the Internet with increasing choice. However, they also allude to the risk of information overload and the feelings of being overwhelmed that accompany it. How to best navigate opportunities

associated with abundance of choice, including exposure to "hybrid fields," is challenging at best. Brad uses a food metaphor to describe the challenge:

> The concern is that there are so many choices and they are so inundated with information, that they will be misled, or will not have the presence of mind to really carefully consider what is the right fit … It is a matter of information overload, that can be distracting. They need guidance [in terms of] how to temper that. Like someone who goes to a wonderful ice cream shop with lots of choices and eats themselves sick rather than choosing a few flavors they truly love. They will need to slow down and think about whether things are a good fit for themselves.

Brad feels that support may be needed to help emerging and young adults navigate this abundance of choice. Companies, also, may need to revise their approach to regulating what employees are permitted to post on social media. Although some companies have attempted to implement policies to the contrary, the laws that protect freedom of speech in more traditional forms of communication also apply to social media (Greenhouse 2013). Bernice, a 55-year-old employer in textile design, echoes Brad's concerns related to technology, specifically with respect to information overload:

> They overbombard themselves with the information, because of technology. Try to block out all the information, and try to stay true to what you want to do. One of the young moms knew she was coming back to work. By the time she was done researching [childcare options], she was distraught in terms of what she had to do. … 'this book said, this web site said'…. it does at times make it more difficult to navigate.

Mike, Fran, and Charles, employers, all in their late 30s, allude to skills, particularly in the interpersonal realm, that are not being nurtured in an information economy heavily reliant on technology.

> MIKE: What is happening is that this information economy is creating a subset of a generation that is ill prepared to interact with real people, to have a working knowledge of things that previous generations took for granted. Having a conversation with the barber at the barbershop, going next door to talk to a neighbor about nothing in particular, to understand how to do anything without consulting Google. Our generation has displaced the capacity of our knowledge to the oracle of Google.

Fran agrees that email is not an efficient teacher of interpersonal skills:

> Emails and lack of communication. [They are a] blessing and a curse. So efficient. This is a generation that does not know how to come up to a senior person and have a conversation and have a healthy dialog. They hide behind their email. They don't have to talk to anybody. I used to have to talk to people that I was afraid to talk to. They could send out notes. I don't think their communications skills are the strongest.

Charles is emphatic about the catastrophic effect of technology on human interaction:

> Their ability to read emotions is just hideous. It's email. I think it is difficult to read the affect and intent in emails. As a result they don't have enough practice. They don't read body language. No affect in reading an email.

However, what may be perceived by employers as *deficits* in interpersonal skills may be understood as *difference* in interpersonal style rather than substance, a style consistent with the demands of a postmodern society. Gilbert

(2011) characterizes Millennials as *more* social and teamwork-oriented than Baby Boomers, as well as *more* tech-savvy:

> Millennials are well educated, skilled in technology, very self-confident, able to multitask, and have plenty of energy. They have high expectations for themselves, and prefer to work in teams, rather than as individuals. Millennials seek challenges, yet work–life balance is of utmost importance to them. They do, however, realize that their need for social interaction, immediate results in their work, and desire for speedy advancement may be seen as weaknesses by older colleagues. (The Millennials section, para. 2)

Carefully designed quantitative and qualitative research protocols are needed to address these thought provoking questions and apparent contradictions (e.g., they are depicted as team-oriented, and socially connected, a characterization that appears to be inconsistent with a "me, me, me" characterization). The research questions themselves need to be further clarified and refined in order to obtain meaningful insights about emerging and young adults in the workplace. For example, rather than depicting this generation in broad strokes as interpersonally deficient in the workplace, a more productive line of research might ask: under what conditions can emerging and young adults thrive and prosper in a way that is consonant with the needs of work settings in a global, highly competitive environment?

Work–Life Balance

The pursuit of work–life balance was identified by a majority of employers as the source of tensions in the workplace. A survey conducted by Spherion (as cited in Cleaver 2006) concluded that work–life balance is one of the three primary factors that impact retention. The report indicated that 32 % of employees reported dissatisfaction with the work–life balance they were maintaining. Furthermore, a 2013 survey revealed that 45 % of Millennials place a higher value on "workplace flexibility" than they do on monetary compensation (Taylor 2013). In a survey conducted by the University of Southern California and the London Business School, 71 % of Millennial participants reported that work demands interfere with their personal lives; 63 % of their older colleagues also identified the same issue as problematic (Langfield 2013).

Despite existing tensions, employers overwhelmingly noted that emerging and young adults brought their personal best to the workplace. However, employers observed that emerging and young adults were seldom unclear, in comparison to the previous generation, about what they were and were not willing to do in the service of a job. Nura, a lawyer and supervisor, and Carmen, a director of human resources, observed that many emerging and young adults, particularly those with children, set clear boundaries, and at the same time committed to and gave their personal best to their work:

NURA: Almost uniformly, they are careful about having more balance in their lives, balance between work and their personal life. We raised them that way, to think they are free enough to respect their personal life, and they want to avoid the pitfalls of the previous generation, to have to work so hard.

I see a significant difference between my mindset and the mindset of people I supervise between 25 and 35. One of the most significant things that I find real interesting [is the mindset of] I am going to do my best every day. I showed loyalty. My approach differs greatly from how they think.

Carmen is more ambivalent, expressing both admiration and frustration at the priorities of her younger colleagues.

Today's kids are separating their home life from their work life much better than our generation. The contract was broken, so they put into the job their professional best, but save a much greater percent of their emotional energy for home. … [They are] much more open about talking about kids at work. Much more committed to their kids. My generation had to hide [talking] about their kids. They choose not to hide. I am not going to tell them they are wrong. They know how to set boundaries with their professional home life. Very good at it. Much better than I was at their age. I'm not sure where it comes from, but I do know that they do care much more about balance. An example would be, a working mom, [an employee] was asked to work later with a 15-month-old baby. She says I'm sorry, my day care will charge me more. I'm not willing to do that. [There are] no consequences. She draws the line. I've done my best and now I am leaving. I don't care if that has to go out tomorrow. Falls on someone else in the department. One of us will pick up the slack.

… The young men in their early 30 s, they will go to a trade show, they have worked nonstop. [They say] okay I am taking this time off. I have given you my whole weekend, give me Friday. They come into the position saying this is work; this is home life, clearly drawing the line.

… They make it clear from the start. I need to leave by 5:30 every day. There is respect associated with openness. When we review the candidate as a group, we appreciate knowing upfront where they are coming from. It makes our life easier.

As people come into new companies, in this age group, they will also say you are offering a little less in salary, I want balance and I am willing to take a little less money to have that balance. I am going to give the company 110 % while I am here, but I am not going to let it rule my entire life.

Dora, an employer of emerging and young adults working in information systems, links the need for work–life balance to the "pace of change." Individuals are being barraged with an ever-changing work environment, which in turn leads to unease and lack of "comfort":

The pace of change is so fast that you can never adjust to the actual change, never get a chance to adjust to it. [It] means you don't get comfort from work. Never in a comfortable position. You separate the treadmill of work from life. It is what you do to live. People don't identify the same way with their work as they used to. Your job is not your life. It is a much healthier thing. It does not define you as a person.

Denise, on the other hand, in speaking about the need for balance, associates the pursuit of work–life balance with delay. She suggests that the need for balance interferes or competes with the pursuit of other activities, such as marriage and children:

My children and my employees constantly need to set priorities to keep a balance between personal life and career. Therefore, they have had to give up some aspects of maturity in favor of others. For example, postponing marriage and children for training for a career.

As Denise suggests, having to choose between a career and family has become an increasingly stressful decision for emerging and young adults. The Pew Research

Center (2012) reports that 49 % of emerging and young adults, 18–34 years old, have taken positions that they are not interested in due to financial constraints. The decision to take jobs due to financial exigencies are more likely to impact employees with more limited economic resources who cannot rely on parents while they are in the midst of a job search. Thirty-one percent of emerging and young adults have postponed marriage and children for financial reasons.

While the current workplace is often characterized as ever-changing, the highly competitive marketplace has created an environment that is not conducive to accommodation in general, and more specifically, to the needs of its employees who are likely to be viewed as self-focused. A 2005 survey conducted by Spherion (Cleaver 2006) suggests the following:

> [Previously] Baby Boom moms largely worked out the details of flexible hours, telecommuting, and the like with their bosses one at a time, behind closed doors, for fear of setting an apple-cart-upsetting precedent Their daughters, now mothers of young children, put their expectations squarely on the table. Employers can respond with 'flexwork' options, or they can look for someone else. (para 5-6)

The current marketplace increases the likelihood that pressed employers, motivated to remain competitive, will "look for someone else."

Prioritizing balance can create tensions, feelings of resentments and ambivalence, as evidenced by the following observation by Carmen, a director of human resources:

> Maybe because I have an old school work ethic, without worrying about the circumstances. They are taking advantage of the company. Makes me take a step back. When I was up and coming, you tried to accommodate both [referring to home and work demands]. [As opposed to the stance], this is very important to me to be at my child's game. I won't be at work. I cannot stay. I sort of feel who am I to judge. I have a lot of respect for people who are at this age. They have good decent positions. They are talented and intelligent and they have things clearly defined coming into the workplace. I'm not sure if there is harm. When raises come around they get the average raise. I have not seen anything that has hindered them professionally for being this way. As a sidebar, they are reliable and responsible.

A chicken and egg question remains as many employers have observed. David, a supervisor of physicians in training, presents a complex picture of shifting commitments and needs. He acknowledges that as his field has changed over the years, so have the recently trained physicians entering it. The meaning of patient care has been transformed, as well as the players negotiating the terrain. David states:

> Medicine is different. There is a delayed maturational process because of the structure, by definition. One can argue that maybe a byproduct of the change in work hours [is] that maybe people will spend more time in terms of maturational stuff than before. Too early to tell. In 10, 15 years, we will have to see the next generation of doctors. Are they more content, more balanced in their life, better parents? [The] previous generation were great doctors, but they did it at the expense of their family life. You have far more two career families, and that has changed. That puts a new slant on family life….
> They [physicians in training] need to be honest about the different competing forces in their life. Potential conflict about location between wife and husband needs to be negotiated….

The change in medicine is that people, in the old days, they chose a job [and] the intention was that it will be their practice forever. Now, [it is] I will try something, if it does not work out, I will try something else. Not so sure [that] it is necessarily bad. People out in practice move around a lot more than they have before. Changing structure of medicine, work for an HMO. Turnover in docs can be 25 % a year. People view it as a job, don't bring in the same sense of commitment, some of it may be because they are an employee, not in their own practice. What is the cart, what is the horse? If you know you're are not going to be in control of your environment, you do approach it differently. If you are not on a salary, your attitude is a little different.

All the stuff going on with regulation has put a slant on people's view of the job. More of a job rather than a calling. All this shift mentality and people not taking ownership for what they do. They do not have the same dedication to taking care of patients.

Employers overall expressed ambivalence related to their employees' attitudes toward work–family commitments. While on the one hand, they respected their abilities to set boundaries and viewed emerging and young adults bringing their personal best to their respective work sites ("110 % while on the job"), they identified a difference in terms of their own work attitudes. Many employers, in contrast to their perceptions of emerging and young adult employees, viewed themselves as committed to doing what needed to be done despite the personal inconvenience. The mindsets of Carmen and David, both in supervisory positions of influence and power, are clearly different from many of their emerging and young adult supervisees, and the differing mindsets are bound to create work-related tensions. In the context of a competitive global marketplace with very little room for error, accommodation on the part of organizations and their respective employers to the needs of emerging and young adult employees, (experienced by many employers as the self-focused, mobile, and ready to embark on a new adventure at a moment's whim in pursuit of passion and purpose), is not a priority. It is in short supply.

Mentoring

Mentoring was identified by employers as an empowering source of support, helping emerging and young adults thrive and advance in the workplace. According to Allen et al. (2000) (as cited by Casto et al. 2005) mentoring is a relationship in which "a less experienced individual is nurtured, trained and 'shown the ropes' by a more experienced person" (p. 333). As Parks (2011) explains "the term mentor is best reserved for a distinctive role in the story of human becoming" (p. 166).

A divergence of views was expressed with respect to mentoring availability. Assessments made by Derek (supervisor of mental health personnel), Serge (supervisor of technology consultants), Alisa (supervisor of educational personnel), and David (supervisor of physicians in training) represent the diverse views expressed by participants in terms of mentoring availability.

DEREK: Mentoring is not structurally available. We are asked to mentor but no one has time for that. Way too busy to help someone. Only way we can structurally do it is through internships. It is costly. …It is not structurally available. What structure is

available in corporate America? The idea of a mentor selflessly providing a service is important, but everything needs to get paid for.

SERGE: I think mentoring is very important. I do agree that it is not the easiest thing. It is easier if you are a goal directed person. If you are not, it is harder to get mentored. … I think a lot of mentoring is available and goes unused. The kids don't know how to access it and are kind of embarrassed to admit that they need it. I wish that the college experience included a lot of mentoring. Not something that you had to seek out, something you had to go through.

And the last piece of that is that it requires good social skills to tap people of another generation. Kids have lack of social skills. It is missing for a lot of kids, what we call home training. I understand that our generation is so task- oriented and busy.

Alisa concurs with Serge that the lack of mentoring experiences is related to a lack of interpersonal skills and fears of rejection:

I don't believe that it is that difficult to find mentors. [It is] difficult for individuals to reach out to the mentors. It has to do with the thought [that] they will be blown off, made fun of, pushed away, when in fact a lot of people are very happy to assist people and give guidance. You don't know how they will respond. [It is] a lack of understanding of how people are actually. Here is this adult above them, an authority they have to deal with, and that is intimidating. I know how difficult my career path was, and if I could make it easier for someone I would be happy to do that.

In his profession, David sees the mentorship problem in terms of the emotional availability of older physicians for the role:

[Mentoring is] problematic in our profession. It is hard to mandate mentors. Like any relationship there needs to be a certain chemistry. You have to promote an environment where people are able to seek out mentors. The problem in medicine [is] a lot of people who are viewed as role models are not the most happy or content.

The bottom line is that in medicine [doctors are] dealing with pressures that they never dealt with before. [It has] caused disillusionment, anger, which sometimes gets translated down to people that they are mentoring.

The importance of emerging and young adults reaching out to potential mentors was emphasized by Marie, a supervisor of sales personnel. Embarrassment and shame were thought to inhibit emerging and young adults from reaching out to mentors. Furthermore, Millennials have been raised in a "child-centric" era in which they received constant feedback from their parents without even having to ask for it (Firestone 2013). It is possible that some emerging and young adults lack the skills to ask their employers for the feedback they desire, and/or the awareness that they even need to do so. As Marie points out, "You need to reach out. People are very open to sharing and that holds true for me professionally. I am always happy to share a profession that I have enjoyed with someone that is younger."

On the other hand, it may be up to employers to meet Millennials halfway and reconsider the traditional methods of employee development. Gilbert (2011) suggests that Millennials crave more frequent and dynamic feedback than an annual or semiannual review, and recommends that employers "give them checklists, offer plenty of help, reward them for innovating and taking appropriate risks, engage them with frequent feedback, provide them with mentors, create a collegial and team-oriented culture, etc." (The Millennial Difference section, para. 3).

The views expressed regarding the positive aspects of mentoring are supported across the literature. Mentoring was overwhelmingly valued by employers and viewed as helpful in launching and sustaining careers. Employers interviewed tended to agree that good mentoring provides opportunities for individuals to find out how to best maximize their talents (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000), and that positive mentoring experiences provide opportunities to demonstrate career commitment, a finding that is particularly relevant to women and minority groups (Russell 1994; Allen et al. 2000). Positive mentoring helps individuals to "combat feelings of isolation and marginalization" (Casto et al. 2005, p. 333).

Compared to men, women who advance to senior management are more likely to report having mentors (Russell 1994). In addition, women who did not reach senior managerial positions are more likely to attribute lack of support and instrumental help from supervisors as a primary reason for lack of advancement (Burke et al. 1994). Not unlike women in the marketplace, individuals of color are more likely to advance in their career paths with a strong network of mentors supporting and guiding their efforts. Individuals of color who were less likely to be promoted, in contrast, received mentoring that was different; their mentors engaged in instructional mentoring exclusively, whereas those who rose to executive positions developed relationships with their mentors that were wider in scope and included a more personal component (Thomas 2001). They developed relationships with their mentors that were characterized by feelings of connection. As Washington (2007) explains, "managers who understand the importance of formal mentoring for women can help create work environments that provide equal opportunities for advancement for both men and women" (p. 1).

With comprehensive mentoring, emerging and young adults are better prepared to negotiate complex work scenarios, including acquisition of interpersonal skills (i.e., working toward mastery of office politics), as well as skills related to knowledge-based expertise of the industry (Casto et al. 2005). The key functions of mentors, particularly for marginalized populations, include: (a) recommendations for promotion; (b) active encouragement to strive for higher goals; (c) advising mentees on their worth and enhancing their self-confidence; (d) helping mentees cope with resentment and discrimination, as well as deal more effectively with their coworkers; (e) pointing out their positive attributes to others; (f) helping mentees overcome discouragement; (g) inspiring mentees to be more creative; (h) keeping their performance visible to senior management; and (i) giving mentees credit for their work (Russell 1994).

Emerging and young adults brought a perspective of their own in terms of mentoring. Many tended to view potential mentors as pressed for time, pressured to produce within tight deadlines, and not adequately "incentivized" to mentor. Given recent cuts in middle management personnel, there was also the perception by some emerging and young adult participants that a paucity of available mentors existed. In comparison, despite a work context that may not support mentoring relationships (given time pressures and lack of financial compensation), a majority of employers interviewed tended to view mentoring relationships as available if appropriately sought out by emerging and young adults.

Participant employers urged emerging and young adults to "reach out" to potential mentors, and to overcome feelings of possible embarrassment or

shame, but fiscal concerns associated with the mentoring role were also raised by employer participants. Employers interviewed were volunteers, which may account for the enthusiasm expressed regarding mentoring, and their assessments may be overly optimistic.

Advice Offered by Employers

Passion was identified and reinforced as an important driver of career choice and behavior. The most frequently given advice by employers to emerging and young adults related to the importance of the pursuit of passion. Interestingly, employers and emerging and young adults are allied in terms of the value they place on the pursuit of passion. Brad, Ellen, and David describe emerging and young adults as passionate, and provide the following advice:

> BRAD: I would say that the most important thing to me [is that] they should only pursue something that in their hearts is exciting to them. But, I often say to people who are doing research, if you wake up in the middle of the night, and all you think about is the science, that is a good sign. I think they need to follow their hearts, not just their heads. They need to think about it in a quiet moment, unencumbered by influence of parents and close friends. What really excites them. The irony is that the only way to find your passion is to give yourself the time to find it. And that is okay.

Ellen equally recommends passion, with the caveat that it be responsive to opportunity:

> I always advise [emerging and young adults] to follow your passion. It is where your gifts lie. It is where you take risks; intuitively you know when you can take risks. … Follow your passion, not completely blindly. Focus your passion where there is opportunity. You will really make a difference in the world. When we follow our passion, we can create a better world. We cannot, as a society, do everybody's job. You create a healthy society when you follow your passion because your passion is where your gifts are. … Fundamentally, you are happier, and that has its own rewards.

David differs with earlier assessments in lamenting the lack of space for emerging and young adults to develop passion:

> Follow your passion. You have to be happy doing what you are doing, and if you are happy you will do a good job at it. Choosing your career, you have to objectively look at not only what turns you on, but objectively look at what your strengths and weaknesses are.
> The system has been set up at too accelerated a pace. Kids don't have time to assess where they are going, to sort out all the different career options. These kids for instance, they feel like they get caught up in a roller coaster. Easy to feel the pressure. … No need to rush into something. Take your time and you will have a better sense of what is best for you.
> They may take an extra year before applying for fellowship. The vast majority need to realize that there is nothing wrong with that. All the stuff going on with regulation has put a slant on people's view of the job. More of a job rather than a calling.

Employers advised against premature foreclosure. They urged emerging and young adults to honestly and realistically assess their skill sets and determine how they interface with the marketplace. In addition, employers argued for colleges and

educational systems to take a more proactive stance in preparing students for the world of work.

Existing Tensions, Expressed Concerns

Some employers identified attitudinal differences toward work between Baby Boomer employers and their Millennial employees. Existing tensions associated with personal beliefs about responsibility to oneself versus responsibility to an organization were identified. Ellen, a 44-year-old manager working in the arts, relates an experience with an employee taking time off to "grieve," to be emotionally available to a friend, an action she views as irresponsible:

> We had an ambitious clear plan how to turn around a web site. The art director was out for a week, unable to work on the project for two weeks. She [an emerging adult employee] did not have a sense of responsibility for it. She felt she had to go through a grieving process. It was more important for her to be part of this grieving experience with her friends. She was not obligated to her work responsibilities. For the 20-30 generation, for them, work is a nice thing if it fits with their agenda. What is more important is their emotional state, pacing their life according to what their needs are, rather than fitting into an organizational structure's needs. She [the employee] knew the person who died peripherally, and nevertheless she chose to be a support for her close friend who was grieving the loss. … [They have] been catered to all their lives. Everything in their lives has been organized around them, for them, around their needs.

Ellen's experience of herself in the workplace, as well as others of her generation, contrasts with what she observes:

> [We] tended to organize our needs around the needs of others at times. …They seem to be emotionally needy. [They] come from a place where they are more catered to, they are used to having [attention], and they demand more attention to their emotional needs. They are not as focused on work- it is more about what work can do for them personally. They resonate with work as a personal journey. I viewed myself as falling into an organizational structure. I am not used to putting my emotional needs before the needs of an organization. I viewed myself as needing to sacrifice for the organization.

Drew, a 37-year-old manager of emerging and young adults working in the automobile parts industry, echoes Ellen's sentiments:

> Talking from my own personal work ethic, … [they need] to understand that they need to be patient and take their time, and to respect personal responsibility. I think that people I supervise, in general, they don't feel as accountable, and therefore not as reliable. Follow through is poor. I see it more out there, coming from the expectation that they don't need to be accountable.

Tensions between emerging and young adults and employers are a natural outgrowth of existing generational diversity in the workforce. Sixty percent of employers report that "their workplaces suffer from tension between the generations" (Twenge 2006, p. 217). However, Lester et al. (2012) point out that intergenerational tensions are not only bound to occur, but always have, and the reality is that the similarities between Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials in the workplace outnumber the differences.

Nevertheless, Gilbert (2011) contends that there are marked differences between the generations. For example, Baby Boomers tend to value "organizational memory, optimism, and willingness to work long hours" (The Millennials section, para. 1) as their strengths whereas Millennials' "need for social interaction, immediate results in their work, and desire for speedy advancement may be seen as weaknesses by older colleagues" (The Millennials section, para. 2).

A comparison of advice offered by representative experts in the field, Twenge (2006) and Moses (2006) sheds light on existing tensions. Twenge (2006) offers the following advice to employers supervising emerging and young adults:

> The best thing you can do is realize that this generation is not 'spoiled' and does not 'have it easy.' Gen Me has been raised thinking we were special and getting lots from Mom and Dad, but when we hit young adulthood we face an enormous mismatch between what we expect and what we actually get. Before you say 'Poor babies,' realize that the inflated cost of housing and the ultracompetitive market for college and good jobs would be difficult even without our high expectations. A boss who understands this will have a much easier time connecting with young employees. Young people are unlikely to change overnight and berating them isn't going to do any good. …This generation is not motivated by feelings of duty-working hard is not virtuous in itself, but it is worth it if they are singled out and recognized. …They appreciate directness rather than abstraction. They do not have automatic respect for authority and will feel free to make suggestions if they think it will improve things. You may have to earn their respect rather than receiving it simply by your position in the company. (p. 217)

Moses (2006), an organizational career management expert, observes that both employers and emerging and young adults wish to engage with meaningful, stimulating work where their effort is valued and the importance of personal time outside of work is acknowledged. In attempting to appeal to employers' desire to attract and retain emerging and young adult employees, Moses (2006) offers two defining "descriptions" of this employee cohort: (a) the "effort/reward ratio is out of whack," with not enough focus on employees and too much focus on productivity; and (b) "They have high expectations that their feelings count, they should be happy all the time and they should be treated with the nurturing care that their parents and teachers showed them" (p. 1). Moses emphasizes the unappealing "erosion of interpersonal skills" marring today's work environment, in contrast to the collegial environments new hires are anticipating (p. 1). Emerging and young adult employees are ambitious, but also want work to be fun and interactive.

In response to the descriptions offered, Moses offers several "prescriptions" for employers to integrate and maximize their young employees. She suggests being understanding of the desire for a constant learning environment, providing "high-profile assignments, and lots of feedback and recognition" (p. 2). Employers need to be more accepting of body ornamentation such as piercings and tattoos, which are more mainstream than seen in previous generations. Moses indicates that employers should recognize differences in motivation, such as belonging to a team, work–life balance, security, and intellectual stimulation. Finally, Moses proposes that offering support via "coaching, mentoring and leadership training" (p. 4) is essential for fostering new talent, supporting longer term commitments, and filling the shoes of retiring older managers—something employers neglected in Gen. X.

Meister (2013) recommends that emerging and young adults recognize that attention to details is critical, offering simple but potentially consequential advice to emerging adults in the workplace. This includes not friending your supervisors on Facebook, as one might with sites such as Linked In. She recommends avoiding discussion of work on social media altogether, pointing out that it is potentially an indelible source of information about you, and your attitudes, for present and potential employers. She reminds emerging and young adults that their continual texting is bewildering to older employers, and is frequently viewed as wasting time. Meister suggests that emerging and young adults make themselves useful to employers as marketing barometers of their demographic—typical consumers, who know what their peers want. Above all, she recommends that employees entering the marketplace make an effort to learn the chain of command culture: how, and with whom, to communicate ideas most effectively. Some senior managers, for example, may have an open door policy for employees at every level, but others may not.

Advice offered by Twenge (2006), Moses (2006), and most recently by Meister and Willyerd (2010) and Meister (2013) are representative of contemporary thinking on the best ways to navigate existing tensions between emerging and young adults and their older employers. These authors bring an understanding of the complexity of the issues, and each is attempting to constructively address productivity and satisfaction levels. Question abound whether the prescriptions offered above can be heard and appreciated, and experienced as helpful. What is clear is that there is convergence with respect to the experience of the workplace; both employers and emerging adults described the work environment in similar terms. What is less clear is how to best address identified concerns and tensions. Wakefield (2006) concludes that given generational diversity in the workforce and the challenges associated with wide range of views and orientations, it behooves organizations to "find ways to connect the values of each generation" (p.5).

Employers and emerging and young adults, as well as the organizations in which they reside, will need to engage in a process that requires understanding and working with the perspective of the other. As Wakefield (2006) describes below, collectively, the diversity of perspectives between employers and emerging and young adults can serve to enrich and propel progress:

> Understanding generational differences can help an organization recruit, develop and retain professionals of all ages. It can also help to promote generational dialog on topics such as past and current assumptions about issues and their causes, and how these issues have been addressed and how to move solutions forward in the coming decades. (p.5)

Conclusions

Despite a range of employer participants, they unanimously viewed the work environment as highly competitive and lacking loyalty on both sides. Employers agreed with the views of emerging and young adults that the work environment often treated employees as commodities, disposable in the context of changing market conditions. Those emerging and young adults without valued skill sets, typically grounded in the

liberal arts, even though intellectually adept, were viewed by employers as vulnerable. Employers applauded the flexibility and sense of comfort with diversity emerging and young adults brought to their respective work environments.

Employers observed a difference in attitudes regarding work–life balance issues. In their view, emerging and young adults, although hardworking, creative, and industrious as a group, were more likely to set limits in their respective work settings, in particular on issues related to work overload. Employers, viewing emerging and young adult through their prism, tended to experience their emerging and young adult employees as less conforming and less committed to prevailing cultural corporate norms. Although both employers and employees are in pursuit of work–life balance, potential tensions are likely to emerge given a difference in the amount of personal sacrifice required to meet objectives. Observers of these tensions seem to concur that both employers and their younger employees need to travel some distance toward the worldview of the other to arrive at a balance that, while still imperfect, serves the needs of both.

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Chapter 11
Running on Empty, Running on Full

Emerging and young adults are not monolithic, and the meanings they have derived from the diverse professional and interpersonal paths they have traveled are varied and textured. Each generation navigates the journey to adulthood in its own way. Multiple environmental contexts have informed their journeys, their inevitable detours, and the adaptations and improvisations they have felt compelled to make.

Across class, gender, and ethnicity, many emerging and young adults are required to navigate the terrain on their own, without adequate institutional scaffolding that earlier generations enjoyed. Emerging and young adults are called upon to demonstrate increased agency, volition, and what Cote (2006) terms "identity capital" –self-understanding, self-discipline, and planfulness. Those who lack identity capital are at great risk of being forced to choose from among the dwindling available options. They are simultaneously "running on empty" (without adequate scaffolding), and "running on full," negotiating choices in a context of a stimulating environment that offers more possibilities than it may be able to fulfill, particularly for those whose skill sets are not valued in the marketplace.

This generation of emerging and young adults has been depicted as "the most wanted generation in history," (given advances in birth control) and the most pampered. Henry (2006) believes they have learned their lessons well:

> Feeling good about yourself is the most important thing in life. …Self-love is not so much a goal as a birthright. … Old-fashioned values like hard work and skill have been cast aside in favor of giving everyone a gold star because they're good enough, smart enough, and doggone it, people like them! (p. 32)

Ryan, a 26-year-old participant, offers an alternative perspective:

> My generation is self-centered for a reason. We never felt that the institutions were there for us. Long-term jobs and pensions are not there. Social security is going to disappear.

> You know what. I have to take care of myself. I felt screwed in my 20s, the Baby Boomers
> are to blame, their gain is my loss.

The two perspectives offer divergent assessments of emerging and young adults living in the United States. The first narrative depicts them as coddled, self-involved, undisciplined, seeking and expecting immediate gratification as well as unconditional recognition. The second narrative describes dysfunctional and/or vanishing systems that are in large part due to lack of forethought and planning by the Boomer generation. In this scenario, emerging and young adults face the onerous task of not only having to fend for themselves, but also having to clean up the "mess" left behind.

This chapter will review major findings related to the contexts emerging and young adults encountered, followed by a summary of distinguishing characteristics and attitudes of the stakeholders—emerging and young adults, parents, and employers. It is important to note that the voices captured are those of individuals who are college graduates living on the northeast coast, volunteers, ranging in age from 25 to 35. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to other populations. With the exception of range in age, the voices of parents and employers recorded here make reference to this demographic subset as well. The pursuit of passion, choice, and lack of structural supports emerge as distinct themes for each of these principal stakeholders. First, a review of the environmental context emerging and young adult participants encountered, followed by a brief summary of the data.

The Environmental Context: A Review

Many emerging and young adults found themselves in an environment in which expectation and/or hope of promise, opportunity, and possibility was not borne out. With increasing freedom, decreasing security, and lack of structural supports, emerging and young adults felt unprepared to deal with the harsh realities they encountered. They expressed feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, insecurity, self-blame, anger, betrayal, and dissatisfaction.

Twenge (2006) explains that "Generation Me has been taught to expect more out of life [and]… all too often, the result is crippling anxiety and crushing depression" (p.109). The overwhelming barrage of demands and realities emerging and young adults confront are further captured by Twenge:

> Overwhelming ambition is on a collision course with diminished possibilities. College is more competitive and expensive than ever…; good jobs are fewer and often pay less; the costs of housing, health insurance and child care continue to spiral. Far from becoming millionaire rapper playboys with their own clothing lines, these kids will be lucky to squeak into the middle class. (p. 33)
>
> Generation Me has so much more than previous generations—we are healthier, enjoy countless modern conveniences and are better educated. But Generation Me often lacks other basic requirements: stable close relationships, a sense of community, a feeling of safety, a simple path to adulthood and the workplace. …as David Myers argues in his book *The American Paradox*, the United States has become a place where we have more but feel

worse. …we long for the social connections of past years, we enter a confusing world of too many choices, and we become depressed at younger and younger ages. (p. 136)

Emerging and young adults in both cohorts overwhelmingly aspired toward traditional goals; satisfying career paths, marriage, and child(ren). However, they navigated the terrain by creating their own paths; they placed premium value on meaning, purpose, and authenticity. They do transition to adulthood status, but on an extended basis. Having graduated from college, it appears to take approximately 5–10 years on average to shift toward independence. It is interesting to note that Americans are living 10 years longer, a time period equivalent to the protracted period emerging and young adults seem to be taking to engage in a process of self-discovery to determine the kind of life they wish to lead. The majority of participants had a defined career path by age 30, and were either married and/or in a committed relationship by age 35. Most of the participants aspired to having at least one child by age 35–40, with a majority of the participants hoping to have two children by age 40.

For many of the participants, the notion of not "settling," finding the "right" person, was key in terms of deciding whether or not to be in a long-term committed relationship or marriage. While they expressed goals similar to those of their parents, the paths chosen in pursuit of these expressed goals varied, including a greater degree of experimentation, exercise of personal choice, an insistence on options, and an enhanced emphasis on developing the self. Parental concern regarding their children's reluctance to "settle down" does not appear to be warranted. For parents, waiting may be the antidote to all the anxiety about the time these detours and adjustments consume; their emerging and young adult children are delaying, but not foregoing careers, marriage, and child(ren).

The Context of Work

The stakeholders—emerging and young adults, parents, and employers—described the work terrain in similar terms. Lack of loyalty on the part of both workers and management was an important driver of behavior. Participants described a work context that included an erosion of trust among employees, employers, and their respective institutions, in part due to a highly competitive and fluid—perhaps even treacherous, global work environment. Emerging and young adults, some of whom directly observed the devastation of layoffs and buyouts on their parents, were determined to minimize their feelings of vulnerability. Stakeholders interviewed tended to view the search for skill sets and/or better jobs as fueled by a fiercely competitive global marketplace; loyalty and commitment no longer applied.

There was recognition by employers, parents, and emerging and young adults that the current marketplace demanded increased productivity in exchange for fewer benefits and guarantees for lifetime employment. In response, emerging and young adults sought ways to grow and direct their careers as much as possible

outside this structure, believing that they needed to rely on their own resources. In contrast, their parents were accustomed to gentler times where companies helped direct those who labored for them. Most emerging and young adult participants, particularly individuals in their 20s in search of opportunity, subscribed to the belief that changing jobs frequently would better position them to build skill sets, and/or provide them with a venue to gain greater clarity regarding their calling. The notion of disposability and lack of loyalty in the workplace intensified the search for these skill sets and reinforced beliefs about the importance of self-reliance.

The career paths of the emerging and young adult participants were varied. Some were "on track" (directed career paths, professional and/or graduate schools). Others tested the waters regarding possible career paths, while a minority of the participants chose to "give back" by committing to time-limited, public, service-oriented programs. Many actively experimented with job possibilities, with most of the participants in pursuit of passion and skills to guide their journey. A majority of the emerging and young adults reported feeling unprepared for the abrupt shift that occurred once they entered the work force, becoming disillusioned with jobs that did not utilize their perceived intellectual capacities and talents.

The primacy of developing a satisfying and meaningful career pervaded the narratives of emerging and young adult who contributed their experiences. Most revisited and reassessed career expectations and perceived choices, some with deliberate forethought, others more randomly, but, by age 30, the majority of the participants were on a career trajectory. They acknowledged that their career paths might shift over time, given current marketplace realities; the majority spoke to the importance of maintaining a flexible, adaptive open stance, a perspective that was reinforced by employers and parents, who seemed to comprehend that fast footwork career-wise was now on par with planfulness as a tactical measure.

A minority of employers expressed frustration related to the attitudes and behaviors emerging and young adults brought to the workforce, deploying descriptors such as *demanding, entitled, lacking patience, expecting too much too soon*, and *not willing to put in the time* for advancement. They also, however, acknowledged that the current workforce is less likely to retire at age 65, "clogging up the pipes" for emerging and young adults.

Parents expressed ambivalence toward their children's experimental stance. While they simultaneously applauded their children's efforts to optimally position themselves in the workplace, they also expressed concern related to length of time taken to develop career paths and committed relationships.

Question arises as to whether the observed delays and accompanying tactics described are a manifestation of an immature, impatient, and irresponsible, "me generation," or evidence of a prudent one, learning to adapt and thrive in an environment that views them as disposable and not sufficiently supportive of their actual and potential contributions. Although 66 % of CEO's identified high-quality

employees as the greatest contributor to the growth of the bottom line, and recognized that additional incentives and training and development programs are needed to sustain this, the vast majority of emerging and young adults, particularly those who did not follow a prescribed career path, did not encounter work settings that validated their actual and potential value, a finding also reported by Dvorak (2006). Many felt devalued and underused in the workforce. From their perspective, a contract had been broken: they worked hard in college and expected to be embraced, appreciated, and remunerated accordingly.

In response, many adapted a strategy of experimentation; some actively pursued skill sets that appeared to build and expand on their existing skills, while others engaged in a more random process of employment, hoping to find their passion and/or career path along the way. Given instability in their work lives, in the context of high divorce rates, they tended to delay commitment, although most envisioned a marital or committed relationship and child(ren).

The Social Context

The majority of the participants followed a pathway that included "identity-before-intimacy," that is, having one's career in place before launching a long-term, committed relationship. Having a range of interpersonal experiences tended to be valued and viewed by the participants as helpful in defining and consolidating one's identity. Most emerging and young adults were invested in developing themselves before marriage, preferring to have a sense of themselves as "complete," capable of making a commitment to another who is also complete. Participants attached significance to having a satisfying career in place. They tended to view investment in self as increasing the likelihood of a successful marriage and/or a long-term commitment.

Flexibility and fluidity characterized the interpersonal relationships of many of the participants. Coontz (2005) has observed that there is increasing flexibility and fluidity with respect to the institution of marriage, and also in relationships *prior* to marriage. Many of the participants experimented with a range of individuals, and this improvisational quality opened up the possibility of increased casualness in relationships. And yet, committing to marriage *without* prior experimentation was seen as "risky," experimentation was associated with mitigation of risk.

Fear of divorce informed views and concerns related to long-term commitment and marriage; participants tended to value difference in their relationships, in part to ascertain goodness-of-fit with a potential life partner, and in part to address concerns related to the potential financial loss associated with the poor choice of a life partner.

Emerging and young adults, mindful of alarming divorce rates associated with their parents' generation, were motivated not to replicate their behavior,

and appeared to be on a mission to try to avert failure in their personal lives. One approach to mitigating risk included intensive discussion prior to marriage of roles and responsibilities. While the pursuit of passion informed work-related behavior, many of the participants spoke of their personal relationships with an equal but opposite measure of forethought and deliberation.

The majority of the participants considered that friendships provided stability and support in a highly fluid and mobile work, and social context. They tended to speak of their friends as "families outside of their families," and a significant minority of the participants (particularly those in their 20s who were not married and/or with children) sought to recreate in their friendships a sense of family. Overall, participants in both cohorts tended to view friendships as an important source of sustenance and support, reporting a greater degree of openness and trust in their relationships with friends relative to their parents' generation. Over time, an increasingly important component of friendship included reciprocal support: each individual in the friendship could count on the other, tangibly and emotionally.

And yet, even here, participants struggled with the effect of economic stability in the domain of friendship. Many emerging and young adults, given a fluid work environment, saw friends leave and reemerge over time, as through a revolving door. E-mail, texting, Skyping and a range of social media possibilities including Instagram, for example, although helpful in keeping in touch, did not appear to satisfy and/or replace the social support received via live, face-to-face encounters. The findings of Konstam et al. (2014) support the notion that although emerging adults seek friendships in cyberspace only—that is, friends they have never met face-to-face—these friendships do not replace, nor are they comparable in terms of intimacy and depth with friendships that include a face-to-face component.

Perceived timelines for having children created significant tensions, particularly for female participants. Once married with child(ren), a majority of the married female participants experienced further tensions related to juggling multiple roles. They reported feeling pressured, and did not experience their work settings as supportive of their familial values and goals. In the context of "you should be everything" and "have it all," balancing responsibilities for family and career felt overwhelming for many of the female participants.

Distinguishing Themes

The previous chapters identified themes that were specific to each of the stakeholders—emerging and young adults, parents, and employers. This section will focus on common themes that emerged for the various stakeholders, and their implications: (a) pursuit of passion; (b) choice and its impact; and (c) lack of structural supports.

The Pursuit of Passion

Employers, parents, and emerging and young adults spoke to the importance of finding passion, meaning, purpose, and significance in one's work. A minority of emerging adults, particularly in the affluent cohort, expressed a desire not only to find passion, but also work that was fun, engaging, and meaningful. Emerging and young adults (especially in the affluent cohort), as well as their parents, had high expectations for meaningful work, but these expectations tended to be in conflict with the realities they encountered, particularly for those without clearly delineated career paths.

A minority of participants were disheartened and/or burdened by this shortfall. Hassler's (2005, 2008) assertions regarding the role of passion in our work life are illuminating. Most individuals in their 20s, according to Hassler, are not adept at identifying their passions, rendering the process of finding passion in one's work an elusive one. Furthermore, as has been reported in the literature and confirmed by the interviews, work has taken center stage for this group, to the elimination of other possibilities for the pursuit of meaning. The degree of investment in work, superimposed by the mandate of finding passion in one's work, may leave some emerging and young adults feeling very pressured and vulnerable.

Although a majority of the stakeholders subscribed to the importance of a guiding passion in one's work, I could not discern the precise meanings attached to the pursuit of passion. A range of personal meanings associated with this pursuit can be implied, but were not specifically assessed. For example, the pursuit of passion may include (a) finding "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 1997); (b) finding something of one's own that satisfies needs for autonomy, independence, and self-expression; and/or (c) finding meaning, purpose, or significance in one's work. Is the pursuit of passion a manifestation of the idealism and high expectations espoused by emerging and young adults? A darker view includes the notion that passion is an acceptable "buzzword" that perpetuates and frames the search for the "perfect life," and may inadvertently legitimize avoidant behavior.

The quest for passion may co-occur with the quest for the perfect job, perfect spouse or significant other, or the perfect life. Not "settling" in one's personal or professional life appeared to guide the decision-making processes of some of the participants, particularly those in the affluent cohort. Some subscribed to the belief that there is one *right* job, one *right* significant other, and that it is their responsibility to "figure it all out." To pursue a job that is not "the right one" suggests that one is settling for less. For emerging and young adults who strive for both passion and perfectionism in their work and personal lives, confusion and angst frequently followed.

The Dark Side of Passion: Implications

Hassler (2005, 2008) suggests an alternative, potentially freeing strategy that may minimize the burden associated with the goal of "pursuing one's passion,"

particularly for those emerging and young adults who are unable to identify it. She suggests the following: identification of one's "dream jobs," but juxtaposed with a realistic assessment of one's strengths and skills as well as consideration of marketplace contingencies. Her recommendation can potentially minimize pressures associated with the pursuit of one's passion. In addition, Hassler suggests that it is critical to separate what one *does* from who one *is*. The separation assists in minimizing vulnerability associated with the notion that what one does for work can "fill a void or complete us" (Hassler 2005, p. 272). Fused with our sense of ourselves, work can define us as individuals at the expense of other domains awaiting further development.

Choice

Choice emerged as an important theme for the various stakeholders. While the prevailing narrative for the more affluent cohort of emerging and young adults included ambivalence related to overwhelming choice, for the less affluent cohort, a narrative related to risk and risk management that was qualitatively different emerged. For some, there was a perception of scarcity of choice. Navigating within more limited degrees of freedom, or greater restrictions on one's ability to maneuver and take risks, was a pressing concern for many of the participants in the less affluent cohort. For them, the need for a safety net limited choice selection.

In a context of abundance, emerging and young adults confronted an interesting paradox. They welcomed choice and possibility in their lives, but at the same time felt burdened and ill prepared to deal with the range of choices available to them. Employers and parents also emphasized the difficulty of negotiating a multitude of choices and each of the stakeholders spoke to the co-occurrence of limitless career possibilities with limited career opportunities.

Schwartz (2004) argues that the cumulative effect of abundance of choice is distressing, particularly in the context of regret: the desire to experience the best of everything and the impossibility of doing so. He offers a paradigm for understanding variable responses to an environmental context characterized by abundance of choice in this cohort. While limiting the size of the fishbowl appears to be an apt and insightful possibility for those emerging and young adults who struggle with abundance of choice, expanding the size of the fishbowl within the confines of a safe harbor, appears to be what emerging and young adults with limited economic resources are seeking.

Many of the participants, constrained by economic limitations and family obligations, showed resolve in overcoming adversity. They were able to both assume adult roles and honor their commitments to others. However, their ability to follow their dreams was compromised by this effort. For example, Denise, a 27-year-old participant, expressed a desire to pursue graduate school, but given financial and family responsibilities, chose to consider the needs of her family, and "delay" the resumption of her education. The meaning of choice as it relates to emerging

and young adults needs to be contextualized to include and integrate experiences not only related to abundance, but also related to scarcity. The interplay between choice and available resources during the developmental periods of emerging and young adulthood needs to be further clarified.

The prevailing narrative as it is represented in the literature on emerging and young adults appears to represent the voices of those who live in relative affluence. For those individuals with fewer economic resources and safety nets, a different narrative emerges, one related to the management of risk. Participants in the less affluent cohort may prosper from an environment that exposes them to a wider range of possibilities; in effect a larger fishbowl in which to swim.

The Dark Side of Choice: Implications

> We worry about making the right choice, and we have no one else to blame when our choices go wrong. Personal freedom, the hallmark of our times, is a glorious thing, but too often we stand alone with our self-doubt about our own choices (Twenge 2006, p. 119).

Unprecedented choice has created an environment rife with potential and possibility, but it has also created a need to "keep things simple …to silence the existence of choice in our lives" (Nash and Stevenson 2004, p. 281). Maximization paradigms are problematic, according to Nash and Stevenson (2004) and Schwartz (2004), given that increased choice also increases the likelihood of indecisiveness and/or exhaustion. Schwartz provides a framework for understanding choice that is potentially freeing. Many emerging and young adults may be picking rather than choosing, maximizing rather than satisficing in ways that may be counter-productive. As individuals age and mature, they are less likely to assume a maximizing stance (Schwartz 2004). With increasing experience, individuals adapt more realistic expectations, and are more receptive and satisfied with the notion of good enough. Schwartz (2004) confirms the advantages of this view:

> The idea of multiple attractive beckoning options is something that is specific to modernity. As adults we have learned (not all too well) how to say no to things we find attractive. Knowing the best way to teach kids how to pass up attractive options would make a real contribution to our understanding of modern parenting and its challenges. (p. 5)

Abundance of expectations and choice has created a unique set of challenges. Satisficing is a difficult and initially painful process to implement in day-to-day practice, particularly in a context of relative abundance. It requires giving up the desire to have the best of everything in every domain of our lives; it requires struggling with loss and "settling" for less. Interventions targeted toward the dark side of choice require a new way of thinking about our expectations and thoughts associated with "just enough" and "good enough." However, Schwartz concludes:

> To manage the problem of excessive choice, we must decide which choices in our lives really matter and focus our time and energy there, letting many other opportunities pass us by. But by restricting our options, we will be able to choose less and feel better. (p. 22)

The trick is to learn to embrace and appreciate satisficing, to cultivate it in more and more aspects of life, rather than merely being resigned to it. Becoming a conscious, intentional satisficer makes comparison with how other people are doing less important. It makes regret less likely. In the complex, choice-saturated world we live in, it makes peace of mind possible. (p. 225)

Structural Supports

The stakeholders—emerging and young adults, parents, and to a lesser extent employers—alluded to the lack of available structural support in shaping the experiences of emerging and young adults who tended to expect they would be able to effectively navigate the job market with their own resources. Many were overwhelmed, particularly those with skills and resources that did not meet external and internal expectations. They spoke to the need for increased opportunities in conjunction with systemic support to assist them in successfully negotiating the transition to adulthood.

Apter (2001) concludes that emerging adults in the United States are facing an environment characterized by "decreasing social capital" (p. 267), which privileges those with safety nets. She focuses on the need for greater scaffolding: "Over and over, they [emerging adults] expressed a wish for more personal guidelines and safety nets. …they crave acknowledgment of their hopes. This acknowledgment can be expressed by helping them develop plans to realize theirs hopes" (p. 264).

Emerging and young adults, parents, and employers spoke of the difficulties inherent in transitioning from the relatively safe confines of college to the world of work. They poignantly described the abrupt shift that occurred, many reporting feeling rudderless and disconnected. The powerful combination of heightened expectations and the perception of unlimited choice, in conjunction with limited opportunities were particularly difficult for some to navigate. Representative comments by Adena, a 35-year-old participant raised by a single parent on welfare, summarize the regrets that surround lack of preparation and lack of supports:

> I received absolutely zero guidance as a young adult in high school. Because I had such organization and discipline of focus, no one bothered to tell me about the myriad [of] choices that I knew nothing about. I would have explored much more-getting a journalism degree, public communication, drama degree, interior design. I would have considered many things. The practice of law would have been a much smaller piece of the pie, had I known what I know today.

Adena expressed a moderate degree of regret regarding the meandering path she took both professionally and personally during her 20s. She lacked tangible support at home, as well as at school, and wished that mentors were available to assist her. Although she described her mother as wise, Adena assessed that her mother did not have the skills to help her navigate her career. And yet, despite significant financial limitations, Adena's mother provided her with a weekly allowance, an action that fostered responsibility and opportunity to make reasonable choices.

Since graduating from college, it has taken Adena 12 years to achieve a sense of stability and satisfaction in her personal and professional life. After pursuing multiple careers, including law, she has within the past year launched her own consulting company and a satisfying marriage. Adena's plans do not include children; she has made a deliberate decision in this regard, intending to focus her energies on her career and marriage.

Sergio, a 26-year-old immigrant from Bulgaria, cites the significant impact Robert Kiyosaki, author of the book *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, has had on his life. He describes himself as shy and initially unprepared to deal with the cultural differences he encountered both professionally and socially. He recounts experiencing no supports at school, and relied on Kiyosaki to inspire and guide his future career path:

> I found it [*Rich Dad, Poor Dad*] very inspirational. I wish [that] I read it a bit earlier. It talks about how rich people and poor people think. Basically before reading that book, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I was basically in school getting a degree to get a job. But then after reading the book, I found that may not be the best path to follow. There are other options out there. Investing, starting a business. Things like that. On top of that, the author talks about even if you work all your life, basically [you are] not guaranteed anything at the end of it. Like pensions. …At least the book gave me hope, gave me a direction. Options you never thought about exactly.
> I was raised [in a family] where money was not discussed. Go to school, get a degree, get a job and you are all set. Almost like I did not know anything else. I could not possibly have known about these other choices, like fish in the water, they don't know there is anything outside of water.

Both Adena and Sergio identify the need for individual and systemic support to assist them in the process of transitioning to adulthood. To this task they brought many resources, including intellectual, social, and emotional capital. Nonetheless, both experienced a paucity of assistance along the way. Thoughtful scaffolding can provide the needed support for emerging and young adults who many not be fully aware or have access to options and alternatives outside of their immediate family and community context.

Educational institutions have been remiss in providing scaffolding to offset the "privatizing" of the plethora of information and potential choices emerging and young adults encounter (Warner 2005, pp. 162–163). As revealed in the interviews, parents may not have the financial and tangible resources to assist their children, and under these conditions the costs associated with an individualistic, sink or swim, cultural context are significant (Miller 2006; Twenge 2006). The increased incidence of eating disorders, substance abuse, clinical depression and/or anxiety, is linked in part to the lack of structural supports emerging and young adults are encountering (Paul and Moser 2009). Emerging and young adults need assistance working through a maze of potential choices and possibilities within a context of limited opportunities.

The problems identified and their respective solutions are beyond the grasp of the individual. A proactive, systemic, and collective response is needed, one that is informed by an understanding of the processes influencing the successful transitioning of emerging adults to adulthood. The literature suggests that these

skills can be taught. Career exploration and adaptability, values clarification, and execution of choice are complex issues that require thoughtful, comprehensive approaches based on an understanding of human development (Arnett 2006; Masten et al. 2006; Tanner 2006; Savickas 2013). Embedded within a coherent social policy, consideration and provision of equal access and opportunities, particularly for those emerging and young adults at risk is critical. In summary:

> Understanding that emerging [and young] adulthood is a developmental period during which individuals benefit from exploring themselves and possibilities in love and work before they make commitments implies that resources should be established (e.g., public policies, workplace initiatives, counseling opportunities) to encourage the development and adjustment of all emerging [and young] adults. In this critical turning point in the life span, the years during which adult pathways are established, all emerging [and young] adults should be encouraged to develop a plan and accrue resources that will help them to carry out their plan toward adult self-sufficiency. (Tanner 2006, p. 48)

Concluding Statements and Case Example

The current environmental context is rife with opportunities to develop new narratives, and uncover possibilities and solutions that are potentially more satisfying. For example, Bahney (2006) discusses the decision of a 28-year-old man to quit his job and travel so that he can maintain connections with people in his life who are not in close physical proximity. Two weeks of vacation, as this 28-year-old man views it, is not enough time to visit family at holidays or take a weekend trip. Similarly, a 32-year-old man quits his job as a software engineer, making a calculated decision that his skills are in demand and that he is marketable. He states:

> As the retirement age pushes farther back and the finances for that time of life are less and less certain, it was almost unconscionable to not take advantage of the opportunity to travel now, when I had the money and the health. (para. 18)
> The trick is finding a job that has the balance built in so that I don't have to go off on a grand adventure to recover from work. (para. 20)
> [T]o be unemployed for six weeks is a healthy thing to help you say I am not defined by what I do. …It helps to understand who I am, who my wife is, and that our identity is more important than anything we do. (para. 28)
> And maybe that's what the younger generation gets that their parents didn't: There's always another job. Having grown up in an era of relative prosperity and upward mobility, it's easy to come to that conclusion. (para. 31)

The short and long-term gambits adopted by this software engineer and those like him as they attempt to tread this shifting terrain are unknown. For example, will the delays toward establishing careers and long-term relationships result in better choices and increased satisfaction, given increased levels of maturity, cognitive abilities, and overall judgment? Or, will the environmental context described by participants result in disillusionment, decreased productivity, and decreased satisfaction? Will the quality of marital and long-term relationships improve, with perhaps a decrease in divorce rates, or will the delayed commitment to marriage and parenthood result in decreased satisfaction and poorer mental health (in part due to

marital status serving a protective mental health function)? (Tanner 2006). Given the increased level of introspection and experimentation, will the nature, meaning, and outcomes of mid-life crises change? Little is understood in terms of the long-term consequences of these behavioral shifts.

Attending closely to the voices of these emerging and young adults, what is clear is the degree of complexity and instability they are confronting. Many of the participants feel they are not sufficiently supported, but the majority approach this juncture with resiliency. Participants, particularly those in the affluent cohort, spoke of issues related to loss: told that they could do anything and be anything they wanted to be, they were forced to actively reassess and revamp major beliefs and assumptions.

The majority of the participants believed in the American Dream and their ability to realize it, despite overwhelming obstacles. Traveling alone, privatizing their perceived failures and successes, participants encountered few constants and much debt along the way. Contextually, given the realities described by the participants, and the lack of structural supports available, it is not surprising that over 50 % of emerging and young adults connect with their parents on a daily basis for support (Twenge 2006). Dickerson (2004) captures the terrain, particularly with respect to the level of instability in tandem with the level of expectation:

> Get a man [woman], have a career, make it on your own, look good, be thin, be popular, leave the nest, follow the rules—do it right and in a timely fashion, even if you're not sure it's exactly what you really want. (pp. 3–4)

The environmental context, on the other hand, is creating opportunities to think creatively and negotiate new possibilities that will require individual, community, and societal interventions. Warner (2005) concludes:

> We have developed a tendency, as a generation to privatize our problems. To ferociously work at fixing and perfecting ourselves—instead of focusing on ways we might get society to fix itself. This speaks of a kind of hopelessness—a kind of giving-up on the outside world. It's as though we believe that, in the end, we are all we can count on. And that our power to control ourselves and our families is all the power that we have. (pp. 162–163)

In a similar fashion, Miller (2006) concludes that many of the issues emerging and young adults are struggling with require broader and more comprehensive solutions, which are beyond the scope and repertoire of the individual. Miller speaks specifically to the tensions related to thriving at work and at home:

> Societies need to build a whole viable context of relationships and arrangements. …We should not and do not need to force women to solve a problem that is insoluble by the individual alone. (p. 16)
>
> When forced to choose between only two options—being a full-time parent or full-time worker—we run the risk of feeling like failures. This is because neither one of the options is good enough. This sense of failure causes despair—a profound lack of hope about the whole thing, as is happening today to some women who struggle with the demands of both work and motherhood. Thus, we are always blaming ourselves and feeling inadequate. We believe it is our own fault. We can find our way out of these forced choices. Society needs to help women, men, and families find new, multiple-choice alternatives today. (p. 17)

Emerging and young adult individuals with fewer economic resources are particularly susceptible to self-blame. The findings by Konstam et al. (2014) raise concerns

about self-blame among emerging adults who navigate this developmental period with fewer resources. Similarly, Silva (2013) asserts that individuals are likely to blame themselves for milestones that they have not achieved, especially when they lack economic resources. Silva's findings suggest that self-loathing is more likely to ensue:

> [On a path toward isolation, emerging adults] make a virtue out of self-blame, distrust and disconnection. In order to tell a different kind of coming-of-age story, we need to provide these young men and women with the skills and support to navigate the road to adulthood. Our future depends on it. (para. 18)

Richard, a 27-year-old participant, exemplifies the complexity and instability characteristic of this developmental period. He speaks of a context that he experiences as unsupportive and "cut-throat."

Richard

Richard's journey has been unstable and tumultuous. Until recently, he has felt aimless both professionally and personally. Within the past year, he has found his professional "calling," and just recently has felt ready to expand his existing social network and resume dating.

Richard was raised in an affluent community, the older of two brothers. Both of his parents are professionals and he speaks of his childhood in positive terms. Nevertheless, he describes his childhood environment as highly pressured academically, a difficult context for him to negotiate, "I was never really a student. I really did not see the big picture when I was younger."

Richard views himself as fortunate, enriched by loving parents who brought different perspectives and experiences to the table, given the diversity of their ethnic backgrounds. Although he is enriched by their experiences, growing up in a highly educated, affluent community is one that his parents will never understand, since each of his parents grew up in a working class environment, surpassing the expectations of their respective parents as well as their extended family networks.

When asked to provide a metaphor describing his life to date, Richard responds with the following metaphor, "It is raining outside very, very hard. I have an umbrella with many holes, and I don't know how to stop the water from coming down." He clearly feels overwhelmed by professional and interpersonal demands, views himself as vulnerable and not able to adequately protect himself. His metaphor suggests that he does not feel capable of controlling external forces beyond his control. Richard feels barraged and deluged by the rain.

His transition to college was not an easy one. He committed to a technical major, information systems, a field of study that was not compatible with his interests or his aptitude. Not surprisingly, Richard dropped out of college after the first year, taking time to reassess his goals and values, living at home and working as a waiter. His gregariousness and interest in the food industry served him well, and in that context, Richard excelled. After 2 years, leaving home again, he chose a smaller university in which to retest the waters, an educational setting

in sharp contrast to the large urban university he selected as a high school senior. During his first year, he made a decision to major in business administration. He also entered into a long-term tempestuous relationship with a "troubled" woman, Brenda, a relationship that unfolded in a social network that included a fair amount of partying. After completing college, Richard moved back home, and Brenda decided to come with him.

Richard and Brenda lived with Richard's parents, ostensibly to begin the process of paying off their respective college debts and to save for a down payment for an apartment. They worked in their respective jobs in marketing, continuing to do a fair amount of partying. Richard and Brenda's relationship became increasingly tumultuous and conflict ridden. Brenda "cheated" on Richard, an experience that "devastated" him. While their relationship was sustainable in the relatively protected cocoon of a college environment, it could not endure the realities of their new life together. Brenda grew up in the South and had a difficult time with a different cultural environment, missed her friends, and overall found her new surroundings stifling and encroaching on her needs for autonomy and independence. Their break-up left Richard "devastated."

Two and a half years of effort have gone into the process of "rebuilding" Richard's life. He is currently living at home, making plans to move out within the coming year and beginning the process of re-entering the world of dating. Work has been unsatisfying, and in response Richard has changed jobs on a yearly basis (all of the jobs have been related to marketing). Recently, Richard was offered a job in fundraising and describes a sudden, abrupt process: a "light bulb turned on" for him. Currently, he feels highly motivated and satisfied in his work setting. In speaking about the past two and a half years, he states:

> You realize that you sort of don't know where you are going, and what you want to do, and you feel you should. You feel like the whole world knows what they want, and if you don't, you feel lost, and it is scary. I need to move out of my house and start my life over, start from a new slate. I got out of a very, very serious relationship. As much as I pulled myself together, because of the situation it left me in, I was not able to fully recover until recently. The next step would be moving out and starting over.
> I'm not doing what I want to do. I don't want to live at home. I've already lived practically a married life. I need to get out and start my life over again, and just have a life. I had such a wonderful life. We were an amazing couple. Moving back home kind of killed it all. We realized how different we were, everything started snowballing. We could not do it. We did not want people doing things for us. I'd rather be poor than live off of someone else.

In speaking about his relationship with Brenda, it is evident that Richard carries with him a profound sense of loss. Twenge (2006) effectively captures the impact of loss, in the context of the realities of "modern life":

> Most of Gen Me spend their twenties (and sometimes thirties) in pointless dating, uncertain relationships, and painful breakups. Many relationships last several years and/or involve living together, so the breakups resemble divorces rather than run-of-the-mill heartbreak. (p. 112)
> One of the strangest things about modern life is the expectation that we will stand alone, negotiating breakups, moves, divorces, and manner of heartbreak that previous generations were careful to avoid. (p. 116)

In the process of "rebuilding" his life, Richard has become increasingly focused and goal oriented. He views the change process as occurring suddenly, an "on-off switch." However, listening to Richard's narrative, one has a sense that the process of healing occurred over time and included experimentation. During the interview, Richard mentioned that his father was seriously ill while living at home, an illness that presented without warning, requiring Richard to assume the role of the "man" in the household. Though his father's medical problems have been successfully addressed, it is interesting that Richard did not present his father's illness as being related in any way to the light bulb switching from "off" to "on." Rather than a narrative informed by relationships, roles, responsibilities, and unforeseen strengths, his newfound ability to "see the big picture" is described by Richard with a curious detachment, a mysterious, mystical event that has occurred outside of himself.

The process of rebuilding has included disengaging from friends who are heavy drug users, and experimentation with a wide array of job settings. Richard clearly brings with him social capital (Cote 2006). His capacities to self-regulate, delay gratification, and execute agency have improved dramatically. Based on the interview, it is unclear how and what has made it possible for Richard to change the course of his trajectory. The research of Masten et al. (2006) and Tanner (2006) shed some light, but further longitudinal research (qualitative and quantitative) is needed to understand the processes informing developmental shifts and narrative trajectories such as Richard's, seemingly an accumulation of small, internal events triggered by external forces.

In reflecting on his drug use, Richard states:

> If I had to do it all over again, I probably never would have used drugs, drunk as much. Would not have partied nearly as much. I would have said no to Brenda. We were together for 3 years, … 3 years seems like twenty.
> …It [drugs] is so embedded in the culture. I would not have done it at such a young age. To get out and get smashed every day. There are other things you could be doing with your time. Our generation, we're the ecstasy, pot kids. …It hit us like a ton of bricks. Some of us never recovered. We got it in such mass quantity. Kids were popping pills left and right, every day, and it was turning them into mush.
> I don't know that I have recovered. Luckily my body could not physically handle the drugs. If I did use the drugs, I was physically hung over the next day. A case of beer, I'm out 2 days, like a 2 day planning event. …Drugs are fun. That's why kids do them now. [It is a] means of socialization. When I stopped smoking pot, your whole circle of friends goes away. Then you see who your friends are.
> I just want to have fun with life. I'm still young. [I want to] have my goals set, but not be consumed with just meeting my work goals, my business goals. Having fun is a goal that I think you should have. Life is serious enough as it is. What is the point if you can't enjoy life, have fun.

Richard speaks of his old friends with a sense of sadness:

> Sometimes when I see my friends are going nowhere, I get frustrated to see that. The ambition you want for yourself is not in them. You cannot tell someone to think about the big picture. It is something you have to figure out for yourself. They will never strive to grab anything, do anything. There will always be money problems.

Richard refers to an environment that is fast-paced, materialistic, and overly stimulating, one that focuses on the end result, without adequately addressing the process:

We grew up in the computer age, and everything starts to move so fast. [The] pace of life is so fast. Immediate gratification is embedded in our brain. And with public media, as amazing as it has become, all they see is the wealth. They don't see how the wealth was accumulated, how it was gotten. People see Tiger Woods. See an amazing golfer making millions in tournaments. They don't see what it took to get there. The hours spent perfecting his stroke, his game, physically, mentally. All they see is the end result. And that is what all of us are wanting, to get to the end result without working. We see the jewelry. We see the yachts, clothes. All we want is to want. We don't want to earn it. We don't want to work for it. We just want to get it as fast as possible.

The real world is truly brutal. I'm learning that now as we speak. You have to work hard to make it. It is the only way. The cream always rises to the top, and that is how it is always going to be. I find life is hard. You are not given anything. You have to work for it, and you have no choice but to work for it. And that is a hard reality. Growing up in a pretty decent situation, and you are given everything, you become accustomed to your life which has been given [to you], that you haven't earned.

Now when you realize this is your lifestyle, you have to realize how hard you have to work to achieve that lifestyle. That is scary. You get demoted. I was up here and now I am down here, and that is scary. Medical and dental benefits, if I get a cavity, are my teeth going to fall out?

Richard ends the interview with an optimistic note, but is also somewhat damning of the Boomer generation. His narrative describes the process of having to make it "on your own," without adequate supports:

It is possible to make it in this world. You could surpass your parents. You could do better than even them. These are times of opportunity. You have a chance to do what you really, really want if you are committed to doing it.

The amount of information you can get, you get information in a 100 different ways now. My generation is going to be running this country. The Baby Boomer generation is coming to an end. I think we are more intelligent, not as closed minded. Learning has gotten more sophisticated. We have been taught better. There will be a lot of improvements in the world. We have to see how it happens.

For us, we're still living by your rules. … The people who are governing are worried about themselves, not us. They are taking away medical benefits that people will need. So many things that are messed up. People are worried about themselves. People are not worried about their children. I am going to make rules that will help 60-year-olds. People are not worrying about you in your 20s. Once you get out of the nest, no longer under mama's wings, you are on your own. No one is worried about us. Laws are not being made to help you in any way. Nothing is being done to help people survive in their 20s. We are like rubber balls. We are young enough to bounce back from pretty much anything.

Conclusions

The introductory chapter of this book ends with a reflection by a former student of her experiences during the developmental period of emerging adulthood. It seems fitting that this chapter, the final chapter, should end with the reflections of another former student who has just entered adulthood. Mia's narrative addresses the adjustments and calibrations she has made in the process of navigating her emerging adult years, dreams designed and redesigned.

Mia

I know from my own personal experiences that I was called *idealistic*, *head in the clouds*. [I was] told I better find a rich man to marry and actually mocked for getting my first master's degree and now people like to make it a running joke that I'll be a professional student with my pursuing my second master's. I remember the night before my undergraduate graduation and my best friend at the time, class president, main protest organizer on campus, and I promised each other that we would never sell out and "work for the man." He went on to "sell out" to a major American thriving company and has been in sales ever since.

If the economy had not tanked at a time when a record number of emerging adults were graduating with higher degrees and entering the work force, I'm not sure that my generation's dreams would be mocked the way they are now. I used to ask myself what's wrong with dreaming big or staying optimistic and that things will change. I do know that since I've turned 30, after years of silence on my parents' behalf, that in terms of my boyfriend, it was time to think about getting married or 'keep moving' and with my mother retiring this year, I'm now 'off the payroll,' which has made me serious about finding a paid internship so I can take full financial responsibly for myself and future husband (?). Before when looking for new opportunities, it was more a question of how passionate I was about the cause and flexibility of hours; now it's how much do I get paid and is health insurance included?

I know this is a rather long explanation, but I guess to sum it up, I don't know if it's at 30, or 40, or tomorrow, but at some point, if you are finding out your vocational pursuits are not allowing you to live a quality of life you are happy with, you have to make adjustments or learn to like your quality of life. After 5 years as an environmental organizer and fundraiser, I know that I'm burnt out from this work—long hours, hostile environment, working with volunteers, everyday not knowing if a grant disappeared and whether or not we need to make serious cuts. I thought I could make a difference at this job, and maybe I have, but now as I get older, I personally see that it's time for me to get real.

I'm already starting to see a change with my own decisions. For example, I'm in this program to restart my career and see it as being much more realistic for having a happy and healthy career than working for environmental non-profits; and, I am only looking for paid internships in places with higher predictions of growth. This is better than my last career choice—the 'save the world' job in a dead-end, rural town.

It seems kind of obvious that part of the process of growing up is realizing that you're not going to get everything you want. That's how maturity develops and I would say that it happens even younger than 30. I pretty much realized by the end of college that I might not be able to have it all, but that I would still be able to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Both Richard and Mia describe an experience of rebuilding, reframing, and reprioritizing their work interests, personal values, and lifelong goals. Like many of the emerging and young adults interviewed, they are hopeful that they will find their footing and be informed by the experiences of their 20s. As new directions are discovered, and previous paths discarded or re-integrated, a more defined and confident self emerges. The voices of emerging and young adults combine in a chorus more often tuned to hope and possibility than not, a resilience given voice by Richard as he observes, that his generation "will bounce back from pretty much anything." Most of emerging and young adult participants believe that their lives will turn out well.

Intriguing questions have been raised regarding how we can best harness this possibility and the hope that almost always abides with it, as well as design

interventions, sustained by the evidence of successful therapeutic practice, that make a difference in their lives. Most emerging and young adults have the resilience to shape their own futures. The larger and all-encompassing question concerns the cost in unlived life and time spent working out these problem narratives on their own, in a private sphere that seems unbounded only to the extent that they are plugged into the possibilities of cyberspace. If the choice is between the resources of the individual and the role of the collective, or between networks of sustaining friendships and limitless information entertainment and advice on the Internet, the answer is almost certainly not either/or, but both/and. While the forces influencing the lives of emerging and young adults may take unforeseen directions, they will not subside.

In response to the pressure of crushing debt and educational environment that doesn't answer to future demands, will educational venues creatively invoke or ignore the latent resiliency of emerging adults in discovering what the world holds for them when they leave its quadrangles? Will the private sector tweak its internal cultures to make use of skills they already possess, and find ways to deserve the loyalty they can no longer expect, or will they continue to count on an inexhaustible supply of disposable labor? Will those who take a helping role for emerging adults also engage in the task of uncovering hidden sources of resiliency while in search for answers to perplexing and persistent questions? To suggest that emerging and young adults are passive receptors of positive change is inaccurate; those interviewed will soon shape, or are already shaping, these institutions.

It is these emerging and young adults with their textured and nuanced narratives, who will find their way through the uncharted tangle of the new and the unfamiliar. Each will improvise their approach. Their combined voices bring increased appreciation for the complexity of the challenge. It is my hope that their rich voices were heard.

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Appendices

The material provided below describes the participants of the study as well as methods used to elicit their diverse perspectives. Appendix A describes the participants and the methods, while Appendix B, C, and D include the questionnaires specifically designed for each of the major stakeholders—emerging and young adults, parents, and employers.

Appendix A: Methods

Participants

The major stakeholders—two cohorts of emerging and young adults representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, parents, and employers—were selected for the purpose of gaining a richer more textured understanding of the range of experiences and perspectives regarding the developmental period of emerging and young adulthood. Tables describing the characteristics of the two cohorts of emerging and young adults are presented, followed by tables describing the baseline characteristics of parent and employer participants. Table A.1 describes the characteristics of the total sample of emerging and young adults, whereas Tables A.2 and A.3 describe the characteristics of the affluent and public university graduates respectively. Tables A.4 and A.5 describe parents of emerging and young adults and employers of emerging and young adults.

Procedures

Two cohorts of emerging and young adults were interviewed by phone: (l) 33 individuals attending a public university in the northeast whose mission, in part, is to

Table A.1 Characteristics of total sample of emerging and young adults ($N = 64$)

Variable	n (%)
Age[a]	28.9 (SD = 3.5)
Sex	
Male	32.80
Female	67.20
Ethnicity	
African American	6.20
Mixed race	6.20
Other	12.50
White	75
Educational level	
College degree	100
Graduate degree	42.20
Professional degree	9.40
Religion	
Christian-practicing	34.40
Christian-not practicing	34.40
Jewish-practicing	15.60
Spiritual	1.60
Atheist	12.50
Agnostic	1.60
Marital status	
Married	37.50
Single	62.50
Married with children	15.60
Single with children	4.70
Living arrangement	
Home owner	39.10
Rent (alone)	17.20
Rent (with family)	7.80
Rent (with girlfriend/boyfriend)	6.20
Rent (with roommates)	14.10
With parents	14.10
Other	1.60

Table A.1 (continued)

Variable	n (%)
Employment	
Full time	79.70
Part time	7.80
Unemployed	6.20
Other	6.20
Income	
$0–$5000	7.80
$5000–$10,000	4.70
$15,001–$20,000	3.10
$20,001–$30,000	6.20
$30,001–$40,000	20.40
$40,001–$50,000	18.70
$50,001–$60,000	7.80
$60,001–$75,000	17.20
$75,001–$100,000	4.70
Over $100,000	9.70

[a] Mean (standard deviation)

Table A.2 Characteristics of affluent sample of emerging and young adults ($N = 31$)

Variable	n (%)
Age[a]	27.58 (SD = 2.9)
Sex	
Male	35.50
Female	64.50
Ethnicity	
Mixed race	6.40
Other	6.40
White	87.10
Educational level	
College degree	100
Graduate degree	41.90
Professional degree	12.90
Religion	
Christian-practicing	22.60
Catholic-not practicing	29.00

Table A.2 (continued)

Variable	n (%)
Jewish	32.40
Spiritual	3.20
Atheist	9.70
Agnostic	3.20
Marital status	
Married	29.00
Single	71.00
Married with children	3.20
Living arrangement	
Home owner	29.00
Rent (alone)	22.60
Rent (with family)	6.40
Rent (with girlfriend/boyfriend)	6.40
Rent (with roommates)	19.30
With parents	12.90
Other	3.20
Employment	
Full time	77.40
Part time	9.70
Unemployed	9.70
Other	3.20
Income	
$0–$5000	9.70
$5000–$10,000	3.20
$15,001–$20,000	3.20
$30,001–$40,000	16.10
$40,001–$50,000	12.90
$50,001–$60,000	9.70
$60,001–$75,000	25.80
$75,001–$100,000	6.40
Over $100,000	12.90

[a]Mean (standard deviation)

Table A.3 Characteristics of sample of emerging and young adult graduates of public university ($N = 33$)

Variable	n (%)
Age[a]	30.2 (SD=3.6)
Sex	
Male	30.30
Female	69.70
Ethnicity	
African American	12.10
Mixed race	6.10
White	63.60
Other	18.20
Educational level	
College degree	100
Graduate degree	42.40
Professional degree	6.10
Religion	
Christian-practicing	48.50
Christian-not practicing	36.40
Atheist	15.10
Marital status	
Married	45.40
Single	54.50
Married with children	27.30
Single with children	9.10
Living arrangement	
Home owner	48.50
Rent (with girlfriend/boyfriend)	6.10
Rent (with roommates)	9.10
Rent (with family)	9.10
Rent (alone)	12.10
With parents	15.10
Employment	
Full time	81.80
Part time	6.10
Unemployed	3.00
Other	9.10

Table A.3 (continued)

Variable	n (%)
Income	
$0–$5000	6.10
$5000–$10,000	6.10
$15,001–$20,000	3.00
$20,001–$30,000	12.10
$30,001–$40,000	24.20
$40,001–$50,000	24.20
$50,001–$60,000	6.10
$60,001–$75,000	9.10
$75,001–$100,000	3.00
Over $100,000	6.10

[a] Mean (standard deviation)

Table A.4 Characteristics of parents ($N = 30$)

Variable	n (%)
Age[a]	57.6 (SD = 4.3)
Sex	
Male	20.00
Female	80.00
Ethnicity	
Mixed race	10.00
Other	3.30
White	86.70
Educational level	
Less than college	3.30
College degree	96.70
Graduate degree	46.70
Post secondary degree	13.30
Professional degree	13.30
Religion	
Christian-practicing	26.60
Christian-not practicing	23.30
Jewish-practicing	30.00
Jewish-not practicing	13.30

Table A.4 (continued)

Variable	n (%)
Atheist	6.70
Civil status	
Divorced	10.00
Married	86.70
Single	3.30
Number of children[a]	2.3 (SD = 0.8)
Employment-job category	
Advertising	3.30
Admin/clerical	3.30
Consultant	3.30
Education	20.00
Healthcare	
Mental health	20.00
Non profit-social services	13.30
Information technology	3.30
Media	3.30
Pharmaceutical	3.30
Science	6.70
Real estate	6.70
Retired	3.30
Unemployed	10.00
Income	
$0–$5000	6.70
$10,001–$15,000	3.30
$30,001–$40,000	10.00
$40,001–$50,000	3.30
$50,001–$60,000	3.30
$75,001–$100,000	23.30
Over $100,000	50.00

[a] Mean (standard deviation)

Table A.5 Characteristics of employers ($N = 30$)

Variable	n (%)
Age[a]	46.9(SD = 9.3)
Sex	
Male	56.70
Female	43.30
Educational level	
Less than college	3.30
College degree	96.70
Graduate degree	40.00
Post secondary degree	10.00
Professional degree	16.70
Religion	
Christian-practicing	50.00
Christian-not practicing	3.30
Jewish	33.30
Agnostic	3.30
Atheist	6.70
Greek orthodox	3.30
Marital status	
Divorced	6.70
Married	76.70
Single	16.70
Number of children[a]	1.7(SD = 1.0)
Employment-job category	
Advertising	6.70
Cosmetology	3.30
Education	13.30
Engineering	3.30
Government	3.30
Healthcare	
Medical/dental practitioners	10.00
RN/nurse management	3.30
Mental health	10.00
Non profit-social services	3.30
Biomedical	3.30
Information technology	6.70

Table A.5 (continued)

Variable	n (%)
Legal	6.70
Management	6.70
Marketing	10.00
Media	3.30
Retail	3.30
Sports	3.30
Number of supervisees[a]	18.9(SD=17.6)
Income	
$40,001–$50,000	6.70
$50,001–$60,000	6.70
$60,001–$75,000	20.00
$75,001–$100,000	16.70
Over $100,000	50.00

[a] Mean (standard deviation)

serve first generation college graduates and (2) 31 individuals who spent a majority of their childhood in affluent suburban towns located in the northeast. In addition, 30 parents of individuals ranging in age from 25 to 35, and 30 employers were interviewed. Employers, also located in the northeast, supervised a minimum of five emerging and young adults within the past three years.

Emerging and young adult participants, 25–35 years of age, were randomly selected from a list of graduates provided by the Alumni Office of a public university. Participants were contacted by mail and/or email, informed of the purpose of the research, and if interested were asked to contact the researcher. A phone interview was scheduled at a mutually convenient time. Participation in the interview process occurred only after the individual read the information sheet provided, and gave his/her consent. The average time needed to complete the phone interview for each of the stakeholders was 60 min. A convenience sample of 31 graduates, 25–35 years of age, served as a comparison group. Graduates were recruited from advertisements appearing in pre-selected affluent towns located in the northeast, or via recommendations of the participants. The towns were selected based on public information available regarding average single-family tax bills. Participants were asked to contact the researcher, and once contact was made, the same procedure as described above was followed.

The convenience sample of 30 parents was recruited from advertisements appearing in pre-selected affluent towns in the northeast, or via recommendations of the parent participants. The same procedure as described above was followed. The sample of employers was a convenience sample, recruited from the researcher's professional contacts. In order to qualify as an employer, the individual was required to be in a managerial position, supervising a minimum of five individuals

ranging in age from 25 to 35 within the past 3 years. Effort was made by the author to interview employers representing a diversity of work contexts (e.g., size of company, area of expertise).

The responses of all the constituents-college graduates, parents, and employers were confidential. All of the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed that identifying information would be altered to ensure anonymity.

The narrative data were analyzed following the principles of phenomenological psychology (Camic et al. 2003; Giorgi 1985) and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Henwood and Pigeon 1992, 1995; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Specifically, both grounded theory and phenomenological psychology emphasize the meaning an individual gives to his/her experience and thus attempt to understand participants' experiences on their own terms. This approach emphasizes the importance of lived experience as a valuable and legitimate source of data (Giorgi 1985). The strength of using this type of qualitative research approach is that the richness and complexity of an individual's lived experience is emphasized. In addition to examining the meaning and context of lived experience via qualitative analysis, limited quantitative analysis was used to complement and enhance the data obtained. For example, each of the participants was asked to rate levels of satisfaction in their professional lives on a Likert scale.

The author wanted to understand participants' experiences in their own terms. Thus, in attempting to explore and capture the experiences of individual participants, the author and her graduate assistant, a seasoned mental health professional, reviewed each protocol in order to identify themes that emerged from the narrative data. Unclear responses, as well as any disagreements over category inclusion were addressed in the following way. The data was reviewed, and responses were included in a given category if both of the reviewers felt confident that it was the most appropriate category match. Interview questions appear in Appendix B, C, and D respectively.

Appendix B: Emerging and Young Adult Questionnaire

1. Age: _____

2. Gender   ☐ Female   ☐ Male

3. Ethnicity: _____

4a. Education: _____
  b. Education of parents:
  c. Growing up, did you view yourself as working class, middle class, upper class or a variation of the above?

5. Religion: _____

6. Employment
☐Part-time   ☐Full-time   ☐Unemployed   ☐Self-employed
☐Other _____

7. Current Job: _____
8. Duration: _____
9. Current Income
☐0-$5000   ☐$5000-$10,000   ☐$10,001-$15,000
☐$15,001-$20,000   ☐$20,001-$30,000   ☐$30,001-$40,000
☐$40,001-$50,000   ☐$50,001-$60,000   ☐$60,001-$75,000
☐$75,001-$100,000   ☐over $100,000

10. Previous Employment: _____
_____
11. Duration: _____
_____
12. Past Income: _____
_____

13. Relationship Status
☐Single   ☐Married   ☐Divorced   ☐Widowed   ☐Engaged
☐Involved monogamously   ☐Cohabiting   ☐Separated

14. If you have ever been married, how many times? _____

15. Do you have children? ☐ Yes   ☐ No If yes, how many? _____
      How old? _____

16. Living arrangement
☐Rent Alone   ☐ Rent with roommates   ☐Home owner

☐With parents   ☐ With other family   Other _____

1. Tell me a little about your work life.

   (a) On a scale from one (least satisfied) to ten (most satisfied), how satisfied
       are you?
   (b) What needs to happen to increase your level of satisfaction?

2. What did you expect your work life to be like and what is it actually like?

   (a) To what degree is your work life meeting your expectations?
   (b) How is it not meeting your expectations?
   (c) How would you rewrite the story of your career to date if you could?

3. (a) What did you expect your personal life to be like and what is it actually
       like?
   (b) How is it not meeting your expectations?
   (c) How would you rewrite the story of personal life to date if you could?

4. (a) Where do you expect to be 10 years from now in your work life and per-
       sonal life?

   (b) What are y our short-term goals?

5. If you had to describe your work life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

6. If you had to describe your personal life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

7. (a) The average person has 8.6 jobs by the age of 32, how do you understand that?

   (b) Perhaps this seemingly homogenous group with an average of 8.6 jobs, can be broken down to several groups, can you lend any insights regarding how they came to have 8.6 jobs and what motivates them.

8. (a) Are we living in a time like no other in terms of the world of work? Please explain.

   (b) Are we living in a time like no other in terms of relationships and people in their twenties and early thirties? Please explain.

9. In terms of the world of work, who seems to be doing well under these conditions? Who seems to be suffering?

10. What coping strategies serve you best under these times?

11. In terms of your work history, what led you make the choices that you did, what did the decision making process look like?

12. In terms of your work life, what are some of life lessons that you have learned?

13. If you had to give advice to someone about to embark on his/her career path, what would you tell them?

14. (a) How do your parents understand and perceive your choices around work and your personal life?

    (b) How are their views the same, different from yours in terms of how one conducts himself/herself around work and relationships?

    (c) How do your employers view people in their twenties and their early thirties and their approach to the world of work? How are their views the same, different from yours?

15. Is there a quarter-life crisis and if so-how do you understand it?

16. (a) Individuals in their 20s and early 30s have been described as self absorbed, narcissistic. What are your thoughts about these labels?

    (b) Individuals in their 20s and early 30s have been viewed by some as delayed in terms of developmental markers such as establishing a career, establishing key relationships. Can you respond to this observation?

17. Individuals in their teens have been described as very pressured with many expectations imposed on them. On the other hand, we have a cohort of individuals in their 20s delaying their adulthood in terms of markers we associate with adulthood. How do you reconcile this?

18. (a) How do you think people in their 20s and their early 30s (and you specifically) negotiate their/your friendships differently from your parents? Similarities and differences you observe?

    (b) Do you have adequate social supports? Please elaborate.

19. (a) How do you think individuals in their 20s and early 30s (and you spe-cifically) negotiate their/your most intimate relationships differently from your parents (their generation)?

  (b) Can you tell me about your plans for your career and personal life. (Do you see long-term commitment, marriage, children in your future and how do you see yourself adapting to the diverse roles you will be assuming?)

20. (a) Given all the choices available to you, how do you decide on what it is you want to do professionally and personally?

21. (a) To date, what do you find most difficult about living and negotiating these times? What do you find most satisfying about living and negotiat-ing these times?

  (b) What provides you with a sense of hope about your generation? What nurtures that hope?
  (c) What provides you with a sense of despair about your generation. Please explain.

22. (a) These times have been described as uncertain. Can you comment on how one best navigates in uncertain times. Observations you have made regarding individuals in their 20s and 30s and dealing with uncertainty.
  (b) How do you deal with uncertainty in your life?

23. Given the choices available, how does one best navigate an abundance of choices available to individuals in their 20s and early 30s? Observations you have made regarding individuals in their 20s and early 30s and how do they deal with choice? What seems to be helpful and not helpful?
24. Do you think class and race informs this discussion and if so can you respond?
25. Any additional information you would like to share that captures the experi-ences of individuals trying to navigate their 20s and early 30s?

Appendix C: Parent Questionnaire

1. Age: _____

2. Gender   ☐ Female   ☐ Male

3. Ethnicity: _____

4. Education: _____

5. Religion: _____

6. Employment

☐Part-time ☐Full-time ☐Unemployed ☐Self-employed
☐Other _____

7. Current Job: _____
8. Duration: _____
9. Current Income

☐0-$5000 ☐$5000-$10,000 ☐$10,001-$15,000
☐$15,001-$20,000 ☐$20,001-$30,000 ☐$30,001-$40,000
☐$40,001-$50,000 ☐$50,001-$60,000 ☐$60,001-$75,000
☐$75,001-$100,000 ☐over $100,000

10. Relationship Status

☐Single ☐Married ☐Divorced ☐Widowed ☐Engaged
☐Involved monogamously ☐Cohabitating ☐Separated

11. How many children do you have? _____
    How old? _____

12. Child's current job: _____

13. Child's current relationship status: _____

14. Child's current living arrangement

☐Rent Alone ☐ Rent with roommates ☐Home owner
☐With parents ☐ With other family ☐Other _____

1. Tell me a little bit about your work life if applicable? How satisfied are you?

    (a) On a scale from 1 (least satisfied) to 10 (most satisfied) how satisfied are you?
    (b) What needs to happen to increase your level of satisfaction?

2. What did you expect your child's work life to look like and what is it actually like?

    (a) How is your child's work life meeting his/her expectations? your expectations?
    (b) How is it not meeting his/her expectations? your expectations?
    (c) Is there anything about your child's career path that you would rewrite, what would you keep exactly as is?
    (d) Is there anything about your child's personal path that you would rewrite if you could? What would you keep exactly as is?

3. Where do you expect him/her to be 10 years from now in his work life? What did you expect for their personal life?

4. If you were to describe your child's work life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

   (a) If you were to describe your child's personal life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

5. The average person has 8.6 jobs by the age of 32, how do you understand that?

6. Are we living in a time like no other in terms of the world of work? Please explain.

   (a) Are we living in a time like no other in terms of relationships and people in their twenties? Please explain.

7. Who seem to be doing well under these conditions in terms of the world of work and in terms of one's personal life, who seem to be suffering?

8. What coping strategies serve one best under these times?

9. In terms of your parenting your child in his/her 20s and early 30s, what are some of life lessons that you have learned?

   (a) If you were to describe your child's personal life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

10. If you had to describe major similarities and difference in the way you and your child view the world what would they be? Please explain.

11. Is there a quarter-life crisis and if so-how do they understand it?

12. How do you think employers are viewing individuals in their 20s and early 30s?

13. People in their 20s and early 30s have been described as self absorbed, narcissistic. What are your thoughts about these labels?

   (a) People in their 20s and early 30s have been viewed by some as delayed in terms of developmental markers such as establishing a career, establishing key relationships. Please respond.

   (b) Individuals in their teens have been described as much pressured with many expectations imposed on them. On the other hand, we have a cohort of individuals in their 20s and early 30s delaying their adulthood in terms of markers we associate with adulthood. How do you reconcile this?

14. If you had the chance to do it all over again, how would you parent differently, how would you keep things exactly the same?

   (a) In assessing your generation and how they have parented, what do you view their overall strengths and overall weakness?

   (b) In assessing your child's generation how do you think they will parent? What will be their strengths, weaknesses? What will they mirror, what will they change in terms of their parenting the next generation?

15. What pressing questions do you have as a parent of an adult in their 20s or 30s?

16. Describe a scenario that challenged you as a parent of someone in their 20s or 30s? What were the issues?
    (a) How did you go about trying to figure things out?

17. The following are some questions that parents of individuals in their 20s have. What are your thoughts?

    (a) How do I define my new role? What are my responsibilities? What should my child's responsibilities be with the goal of moving my child toward independent life?
    (b) What does being a good parent look like for this developmental period?
    (c) How much support - instrumental, emotional, financial - should I provide? How much of a safety net should I provide?
    (d) How do I ensure and reinforce mature responsible behavior in my child? At what point do I say you're an adult, you need to be on your own?

18. To date,

    (a) What provides you with a sense of hope about your child's generation? What nurtures that hope? Please explain.
    (b) What provides you with a sense of despair about your child's generation? Please explain.

19. Any additional information you would like to share?

Appendix D: Employer Questionnaire

1. Age: _____

2. Gender   ☐ Female   ☐ Male

3. Religion: _____

4. Education: _____

5. Current Job: _____

6. Duration: _____
7. Current Income
☐0-$5000   ☐$5000-$10,000   ☐$10,001-$15,000
☐$15,001-$20,000   ☐$20,001-$30,000   ☐$30,001-$40,000
☐$40,001-$50,000   ☐$50,001-$60,000   ☐$60,001-$75,000
☐$75,001-$100,000   ☐over $100,000

8. Number of people you supervise: _____

9. Relationship Status
□Single □Married □Divorced □Widowed □Engaged
□Involved monogamously □ Cohabitating □Separated

10. Do you have children? □ Yes □ No
    If yes, how many? _____
    How old? _____

1. Tell me a little about your work life.
   (a) On a scale from one (least satisfied) to ten (most satisfied), how satisfied are you?

2. To what degree is your work life meeting your expectations?
   (a) How is it not meeting your expectations?

3. If you had to describe your work life in terms of a metaphor, what metaphor describes it best?

4. (a) The average person has 8.6 jobs by the age of 32, how do you understand that?
   (b) Perhaps this seemingly homogenous group with an average of 8.6 jobs, can be broken down to several groups, can you lend any insights regarding how they came to have 8.6 jobs and what motivates them.

5. (a) Are we living in a time like no other in terms of the world of work? Please explain.
   (b) Are we living in a time like no other in terms of personal relationships? Please explain.

6. Who seem to be doing well under these conditions, who seem to be suffering?

7. What coping strategies serve someone in their twenties best in these times?

8. What are some of life lessons that many people in their 20s and early 30s need to learn?

9. If you had to give advice to someone about to embark on his/her career path, what would you tell them?

10. Is there a quarter-life crisis and if so-how do they understand it?

11. (a) People in their 20s and early 30s have been described as self absorbed, narcissistic. What are your thoughts about these labels?
    (b) People in their 20s and early 30s have been viewed by some as delayed in terms of developmental markers such as establishing a career, establishing key relationships. Can you respond to this observation?

12. The current generation has been described as very pressured with many expectations imposed on them. We have, on the other hand a cohort of individuals in their 20s and early 30s, delaying their adulthood in terms of markers we associate with adulthood. How do you reconcile this?

13. Do you think people in their 20s and early 30s negotiate their friendships differently? If so how?

14. These times have been described as uncertain. Can you comment and how one best navigates in uncertain times. Observations you have made regarding individuals in their 20s and early 30s and dealing with uncertainty.

    (a) How do you deal with uncertainty in your life?

15. Given the choices available, how does one best navigate an abundance of choices available to individuals in their 20s? Observations you have made regarding individuals in their 20s and dealing with choice.

16. It has been observed that mentoring is difficult for individuals in their 20s to procure. How do you understand it and what recommendation(s) can you offer to people in their 20s regarding mentoring?

17. To date,

    (a) What provides you with a sense of hope about your employee's generation (25–35 yrs of age)? What nurtures that hope? Please explain.

    (b) What provides you with a sense of despair about your employee's generation (25–35 years of age). Please explain.

18. Any additional information you would like to share?

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