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CLARK UNIVERSITY POID of Parents of Emerging Adults

PARENTS AND THEIR GROWN KIDS: Harmony, Support, and (Occasional) Conflict

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Ph.D. • Joseph Schwab • Clark University • Worcester, Massachusetts • clarku.edu/clarkpoll



Preface

If you had only popular culture as a source of "data," you would think that most American parents are fed up with their twentysomething kids. In the first episode of the first season of the hit HBO show "Girls," the parents of Hannah, the show's lead character, deliver some bad news: "We're cutting you off." They tell her, bluntly, that they are no longer willing to support her efforts to make it as a writer in New York City. From now on, she is going to have to fend for herself, without their help. When she follows them later to their hotel to make one last plea for money, they remain adamant. She wakes up the next morning in their hotel room to find them gone, with not a word, a note, or a dollar left behind.

Although "Girls" is an incisive satire of the lives of today's emerging adults, fortunately it is a long way from reality, at least with regard to the relationships between parents and their grown children. The Clark University Poll of Parents of Emerging Adults, summarized in this report, shows a far different picture. For the most part, relations between parents and emerging adults are characterized by harmony, not hostility. In most cases, parents and emerging adults like and respect each other, and they enjoy each other's company. Parents miss their kids when they move out, and enjoy having them live at home, even when they move back in. There are conflicts, yes, especially over money—"Girls" got that much right but parents are generally willing to support their kids emotionally and financially. They realize that their kids are passing through a life stage that is daunting in many ways, and that the support they give to their children can be crucial to making a successful transition to adult life.

This report follows our 2012 report on the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults, which described our national survey of 18- to 29-yearolds. Many findings from the parents' survey dovetail with what was reported in last year's survey. Emerging adults, too, gave an account of their relations with parents that was highly positive. In this year's report we go into far greater detail about the relations between parents and emerging adults, exploring a wide range of topics, from how parents see "AMERICAN PARENTS ARE MORE SIMILAR THAN DIFFERENT, REGARDLESS OF BACKGROUND." the relationship with their children changing over time, to the worries and concerns that parents have about their kids, to the parents' high hopes that their emerging adults will do well in life. We also provide information about how parents appraise their own lives, and how this compares to the emerging adults' self-appraisal.

The Clark University Poll of Parents of Emerging Adults is a national survey, and it represents the diversity of American parents in ethnicity, region, and social class. We highlight some of the variation in this report. Overall, however, American parents are more similar than different, regardless of background. They love their children, and continue to be supportive as their kids navigate through the twenties and gradually move forward along the winding road to adulthood. And as their children enter the new life stage of emerging adulthood and become less dependent than before, parents also enter a new stage of life that seems to hold great promise.

We hope the information contained in this report will be helpful to parents, emerging adults, and others who are involved with emerging adults and care about them. Those who wish to find more information about how to deal with the challenges and problems of parenting emerging adults are encouraged to consult *When Will My Grown-Up Kid Grow Up: Loving and Understanding Your Emerging Adult* (2013, Workman), by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Elizabeth Fishel.

JEFFREY JENSEN ARNETT, Ph.D.

Research Professor of Psychology and Director of the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults

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Graduate Research Assistant

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Meth	odology of the Report 4
I.	Staying Connected 5
II.	Closeness and Harmony Reign 8
III.	Adulthood? It's Gonna Take Money 11
IV.	Challenges of Navigating the Road to Adulthood 15
V.	Welcome Home! Sort of 21
VI.	Entering the Post-Parenting Stage of Life
VII.	In Dark Times, a Bright Future 30

METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT

Questions and requests for further information should be directed to Dr. Arnett, jarnett@clarku.edu. The Clark University Poll of Parents of Emerging Adults consisted of interviews with 1,006 adults who were parents of at least one child aged 18-29. Parents with more than one child in this age range were asked to choose one child who would be the focus of the survey, and to indicate the child's age and gender. The data collection was conducted by Purple Strategies, a professional survey research firm, from March 29 to April 4, 2013. Participants were contacted via three methods: cell phones (100), land lines (406), and the Internet (500).

The director of the poll, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Ph.D., developed the questions in consultation with administrators at Clark and advisers at Steinreich Communications, a public relations firm. At Clark, the contributors were Vice President of Marketing and Communications Paula David and her team. At Steinreich, the contributors were Vice President Andrea Pass and her team.

The total sample was generally representative of the American population of parents of 18- to 29-year-olds. The mean age of the parents was 52. Half the sample was male (49%) and half female (51%). In their ethnicity, 69% were White, 13% Latina/Latino, 11% African American, 5% Asian American, and 2% Other. About two-thirds (68%) were currently married. They were sampled from all regions of the country. One-third lived in the South and one-fourth in the West, with one-fifth each in the Northeast and the Midwest. They were from diverse social classes, as represented by their educational attainment: 41% high school diploma or less; 27% some college or vocational school; 32% four-year college degree or more. About half (48%) were employed full-time, and 16% part-time; of the rest, 12% were unemployed but looking for work and 24% were retired.

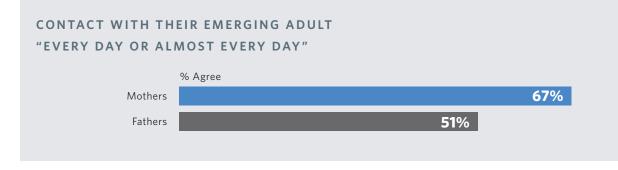
To prepare the report presented here, we conducted statistical analyses for all items by gender, age group of the children (18-21, 22-25, and 26-29), ethnic group, and social class background (i.e., educational level). When there were notable differences in these analyses, we included them in the report. However, we do not always state, for example, "no gender differences were found" for every analysis where there was no gender difference. If no group differences are reported, it can be assumed that no statistical difference was found.

CHAPTER ONE

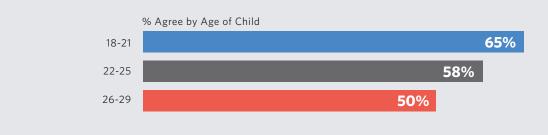
Staying Connected

In many ways, moving through emerging adulthood (ages 18-29) involves becoming more independent from parents. Most young Americans move out of their parents' households at age 18 or 19, either to go to college or just to be more independent. As they enter their twenties they make more and more of their own decisions about issues large and small, from what to have for dinner to whether to take a job offer that would require them to move to another state.

Nevertheless, most emerging adults remain closely connected to their parents. More than half (56%) of parents say they are in contact with their grown kids "every day or almost every day." The younger their adult children, the more often parents have contact with them, but even when the kids are 26 to 29 years old, 50% are in daily contact. Overall, moms (67%) are more likely than dads (51%) to be in contact with their kids "every day or almost every day."

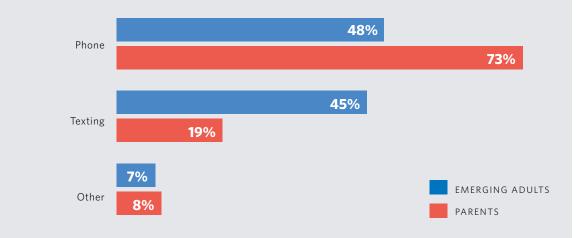


CONTACT WITH THEIR EMERGING ADULT "EVERY DAY OR ALMOST EVERY DAY"



Most parents (66%) say the amount of contact they have with their grown kids is "about right." When parents are less than satisfied, they are more likely to wish for "more contact" (24%) than for "less contact" (10%).

It has been observed that today's emerging adults are "digital natives," having grown up with personal computers, mobile phones, iPods, Facebook and other social media. Their parents, in contrast, are "digital immigrants" who are not quite as comfortable with the new technologies. This divide is reflected in each group's preferences for how to keep in contact with each other. Parents in the poll generally preferred the phone (73%). Kids were more likely than their parents to prefer texting (45% to 19%), but even for emerging adults, digital natives though they may be, the phone was preferred by 48% (according to their parents). Newer technologies, including email, social networks (such as Facebook), and video calling (such as Skype), were preferred by only a few percent of parents or emerging adults. Apparently the old-fashioned phone still allows for greater closeness and more effective communication than any of the new technologies.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS DO YOU PREFER FOR COMMUNICATING WHEN YOU ARE NOT TOGETHER?

Frequent contact between parents and emerging adults allows them to stay emotionally connected even after the kids have moved out of the household. Four out of five parents say their 18- to 29-year-old kids rely on them for emotional support at least occasionally. Most emerging adults have not yet found their "soul mate" and while they are still looking for a life partner, they rely on the connection to their parents as a source of support and nurturance.

CHAPTER TWO

Closeness and Harmony Reign

Parents and their emerging adults get along well, much better than they did when the kids were adolescents. In fact, parents enjoy their relationship with their grown kids more than anything else in their lives—more than hobbies or leisure activities, watching television, travel or holidays, and even their relationship with their spouse or partner.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE CURRENT SOURCES OF ENJOYMENT FOR YOU?

Relationship with my 18-29 year-old children	
Hobbies or leisure activities	84
Watching television	82
Travel or holidays	79
Relationship with spouse or partner	75

%

Parents

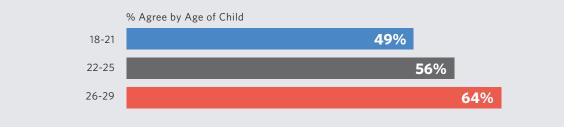
The majority of parents (73%) describe their current relationship with their grown kid as "mostly positive," while only 2% describe their relationship as "mostly negative." Most parents see their relationship with their emerging adult as having improved greatly in recent years. Two-thirds (66%) of parents agree that they get along a lot better with their 18- to 29-year-old now than when the child was in the mid-teens. This is not just the parents' view. In the 2012 national survey of 18- to 29-year-olds, the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults, 75% of emerging adults agreed that they get along a lot better with their parents now than they did in their mid-teens.

Parents see a variety of specific ways their relationship with their child has strengthened and improved from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Asked to compare the relationship now to when the child was age 15, 86% of parents say that they have more adult conversations with their child, 78% enjoy their time together more, and only 16% say that they have more conflict now.

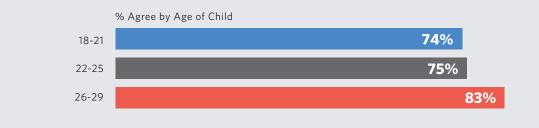
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CHANGES HAVE TAKEN
PLACE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD
%
ParentsWe have more adult conversations.86We enjoy our time together more.78He/she is more respectful toward me.71We have become more like friends.55He/she sees me more as a person rather than a parent.49We are not as close.20We have more conflict now.16

Parents' reports of positive changes grow more pronounced in the course of the emerging adult years. Three-fourths (74%) of parents of 18- to 21-year-olds cite "We enjoy our time together more" as a change that has taken place since the child was age 15, but this rises to 83% for parents of 26- to 29-year-olds. Sixty-four percent of parents with an emerging adult between the ages of 26 and 29 say they have become more like friends now than at age 15, as compared to 49% of parents of emerging adults 18 to 21 years old. Parents of 26- to 29-year-olds are also more likely to believe that their child "sees me more as a person rather than a parent" (55%) compared to parents of younger emerging adults (43%).

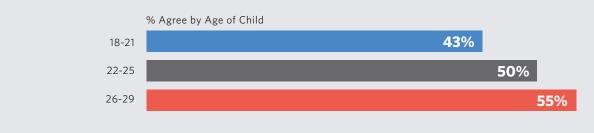
WE HAVE BECOME MORE LIKE FRIENDS



WE ENJOY OUR TIME TOGETHER MORE



MY EMERGING ADULT "SEES ME MORE AS A PERSON RATHER THAN A PARENT"



CHAPTER THREE

Adulthood? It's Gonna Take Money One of the key ways it takes a long time to grow up these days concerns financial independence. Nearly half (44%) of parents say they provide their 18- to 29-year-olds with either "frequent support when needed" or "regular support for living expenses." As might be expected, the higher the parents' socioeconomic status, the more money they have available to share with their grown kids. Among parents with a four-year college degree or more, 43% provide their emerging adults with "regular support for living expenses," compared to 23% of parents with a high school education or less.

Parents' financial support diminishes in the course of emerging adulthood, but remains surprisingly high even when their children reach the late twenties. Only 11% of parents of 18- to 21-year-olds say the amount of the financial support they provide is "none at all," but this rises to 44% among 26- to 29-year-olds. Still, this means that 56% of 26- to 29-year-olds receive at least occasional financial support from their parents. Other research has found that occasional financial support may take forms such as staying on the family cell phone plan, remaining in the parents' health insurance program, or receiving parents' help with a one-time expense such as a car repair or a security deposit on an apartment.

According to parents, they are providing a lot more financial support to their children than they received from their own parents. Only 14% of parents say they received either "frequent support" or "regular support for living expenses" when they were in their twenties, and 61% say that they received little or no support. It is important to keep in mind that this is the parents' report, not an objective financial record. Perhaps parents have a rosier memory of their own progress toward financial independence than was actually the case. However, it might be expected that parents would provide more financial help to their children now than was true a generation ago, because more emerging adults stay in school longer than ever before.

HOW MUCH FINANCIAL SUPPORT DO YOU PROVIDE TO YOUR CHILD?	% Parents
Little or none	26
Occasional support when needed	30
Frequent support when needed	15
Regular support for living expenses	29
HOW MUCH FINANCIAL SUPPORT DID YOUR PARENTS PROVIDE TO YOU WHEN YOU WERE IN YOUR TWENTIES?	% Parents
Little or none	61
Occasional support when needed	26
Frequent support when needed	8
Regular support for living expenses	6

Parents are often concerned about their emerging adults' educational and occupational progress (or lack of it), and frustrated that they sometimes fail to take responsibility for their actions. However, the number one topic of contention between emerging adults and their parents is money, named by 42% of parents as a source of conflict with their child. Despite the many positive trends in relationships between parents and their emerging adult children through the years, money is a major thorn among the roses.

One of the central challenges of emerging adulthood in American society is moving toward independence and self-sufficiency, and money is a concrete representation of progress toward that goal. Parents and emerging adults both experience a considerable amount of ambivalence over the money issues in their relationship. On one side, emerging adults realize they need their parents' financial help in their late teens and early twenties, because they are often pursuing education, and if they are working they are often not making much money. Still, emerging adults do not like being financially dependent on their parents because it gives parents control over their decisions. On the other side, most parents want to do what they can to support their children financially during the emerging adult years and help them reach their educational and occupational goals—but they also feel the drain on their own finances as they approach retirement age, and they believe it is quite reasonable to expect that, if they are giving their kids money, they should have a say in how it is spent.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN TOPICS OF CONFLICT WITH YOUR CHILD NOW, IF ANY? (PARENTS)

Money	42
Not always taking responsibility for his/her actions	37
His/her educational progress	34
His/her occupational progress	33

%

Parents

%

Parents

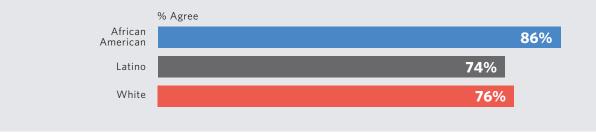
Money issues are a source of concern as well as conflict in the relationships between parents and their emerging adults. Financial problems rank number one as the most common worry or concern that parents have about their child (38%), higher than choosing the wrong romantic partner (28%), lack of work progress (27%), or lack of educational progress (26%). Additionally, half (50%) of all parents are also "somewhat" or "very" concerned that their emerging adult is taking too long to become financially independent.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN WORRIES OR CONCERNS YOU HAVE ABOUT YOUR CHILD?

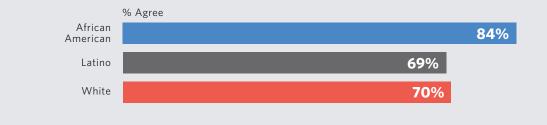
Financial problems	38
Choosing the wrong romantic partner	28
Lack of work progress	27
Lack of educational progress	26

Even though kids may rely on their parents longer than in the past, parents realize they may need their kids' help someday, too. More than three-fourths (77%) of parents are confident that their child will be willing to help care for them in their old age if they need help, with 70% confident that their child will be able to help out financially as well. Expectations of support from their children are especially strong for African American parents, among whom 86% are confident that their child will help care for them in old age, while 74% of Latino parents and 76% of White parents express this confidence. A similar ethnic pattern applies for financial help, as 84% of African American parents are confident that their child will help out financially in the future, compared to 69% of Latino parents and 70% of White parents.

I AM CONFIDENT THAT MY CHILD WILL BE WILLING TO HELP CARE FOR ME IN MY OLD AGE IF I NEED HELP



I AM CONFIDENT THAT MY CHILD WILL BE WILLING TO HELP ME FINANCIALLY IN MY OLD AGE IF I NEED HELP



CHAPTER FOUR

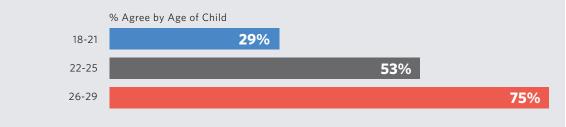
Challenges of Navigating the Road to Adulthood One of the hallmarks of the life stage of emerging adulthood is that it is the age of feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood. According to the 2012 Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults, most 18- to 29- yearolds believe they have changed in important ways since their high school years, and few of them would be happy being described as experiencing an "extended adolescence." But many of them do not feel fully adult, either. They feel they are on the way to adulthood, but not there yet.

Emerging adults and parents have similar views of whether (or not) the kids have reached adulthood.

DO YOU SEE YOUR CHILD AS AN ADULT?	% Parents
Yes	52
No	15
In some ways yes, in some ways no	34
DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE REACHED ADULTHOOD?	% Emerging Adults
Yes	49
No	5
In some ways yes, in some ways no	47

The younger the kids are, the less likely their parents are to view them as adults. At ages 18-21 most parents see the children as being in-between, but by the late twenties a strong majority of parents regard their kids as fully adult.

SEE THEIR CHILD AS AN ADULT



Parents and emerging adults also have similar views of the most important criteria for adulthood. "Accepting responsibility for yourself" ranks highest, followed by "Becoming financially independent." "Getting married," which was traditionally the way most societies marked the attainment of adult status, is no longer a marker of adulthood for Americans, although of course it is important in other ways.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT FOR BECOMING AN ADULT?	% Emerging Adults	% Parents
Accepting responsibility for yourself	36	50
Becoming financially independent	30	22
Making independent decisions	14	15
Finishing education	16	5
Getting married	4	2
Move out of parents' household	-	5

Perhaps because it takes so much longer now to reach full adulthood than it did in the past, parents are sometimes concerned that their grown kids may never make it. Although most are confident that their grown kids will eventually make adult transitions, 25% are "somewhat" or "very" concerned that their child will not find a marriage partner, and 43% are "somewhat" or "very" concerned that their child might never find a stable job. More generally, 25% of parents are concerned that their child will never become fully adult.

%

Parents

18

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER MIGHT NOT FIND A MARRIAGE PARTNER?

Not at all concerned	57
Somewhat concerned	19
Very concerned	6
Not applicable—he/she is already married or about to be married	18
TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER MIGHT NEVER FIND A STABLE JOB?	% Parents
Not at all concerned	40
Somewhat concerned	25
Very concerned	18
Not applicable—he/she already has a stable job	18
TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU CONCERNED THAT YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER MIGHT NEVER BECOME FULLY ADULT?	% Parents
Not at all concerned	57
Somewhat concerned	16
Very concerned	9

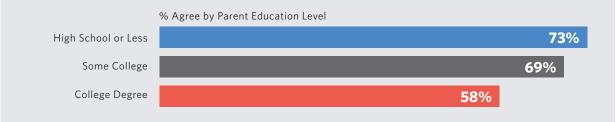
Not applicable—I already consider him/her to be fully adult

It is not only for their own children that parents have concerns. Overall, 43% of parents see the longer path to adulthood that is typical today as negative, and only 13% see it as positive.

IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT YOUNG
PEOPLE TAKE LONGER TO REACH ADULTHOOD
TODAY THAN 30 OR 40 YEARS AGO.%Do you see the later entry into adulthood today as
positive, or negative, or both?%Positive13Negative43Both positive and negative44

There are many reasons why it takes longer to reach full adulthood today than it did in the past. Perhaps the main reason is that the economy has changed, from a mainly manufacturing economy to one based more on information, technology, and services. The new economy requires more education, training, and experience to get a decent long-term job, and consequently most 18- to 29-year-olds are focused during this time on gaining education and training and then making their way into the workforce. However, another reason for the longer entry to adulthood may be that American society has become more tolerant of young people using most of their twenties to make their way to adulthood at a gradual pace, and to enjoy a period of fun and freedom before taking on the enduring responsibilities of adult life. Parents generally believe that times have changed in ways that make this period of life easier for their children than it was for them. In the current poll, 68% of parents of emerging adults agree that "My child has an easier life now than I did at the same age." There is some variation in responses to this question depending on the parents' education. Among parents who have a high school education, or less, 73% agree that their child has an easier life now, compared to 58% of parents who have a college degree or more. This may be because parents with less education had to struggle to make a living right out of high school.

MY CHILD HAS AN EASIER LIFE NOW THAN I DID AT THE SAME AGE



Parents see their children not only as having an easier life, but a better life in some ways. Compared to their own lives at that age, 42% of parents see their emerging adults' lives as more fun and exciting (only 17% less fun and exciting), and 63% of parents see their emerging adults as having more opportunities (only 19% fewer opportunities). As with the question about the easier life, the less education parents have, the more likely they are to see their kids as having more opportunities than they did at that age. Among parents who have a high school education or less, 70% agree that their child has more opportunities than they did, compared to 51% of parents who have a college degree or more. This is clearly a reflection of the greater opportunities that were available to parents who have higher education credentials.

COMPARED TO MY LIFE AT THAT AGE, MY CHILD HAS MORE OPPORTUNITIES



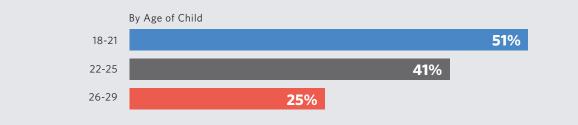
CHAPTER FIVE

Welcome Home! Sort of

One of the favorite topics in the popular media regarding emerging adults is that they take longer to move out of their parents' households than previous generations did, and after they move out, they may move right back in again at some point in their twenties. In the popular narrative, this is viewed as a "failure to launch," and emerging adults are ridiculed for relying on their parents for a place to live.

It is true that a relatively high proportion of 18- to 29-year-olds (38%) in our survey live in their parents' household, according to the parents. The proportion is highest among the youngest emerging adults, with 51% of 18- to 21-year-olds living with their parents, and declines to 41% among 22- to 25-year-olds and further still to 25% of 26- to 29-year-olds.

EMERGING ADULT LIVING AT HOME RIGHT NOW



However, the popular view that parents groan when their adult children move back home and immediately begin scheming to get them out again could not be further from the truth. Of the parents who have an emerging adult child living with them, 61% describe their feelings about it as "mostly positive" and only 6% describe the experience as "mostly negative."

IF YOUR CHILD IS LIVING AT HAS MOVED BACK IN: Which be feelings about your child living with yo	est describes your %
Mostly positive	61
Mostly negative	6
Equally positive and negative	33

When emerging adults live at home, parents' lives are disrupted in various ways, but they are more likely to see benefits than burdens. The three top consequences that parents have observed from having their grown kids at home are all positive, with 67% of parents saying they feel closer to their child emotionally, 66% saying they have more companionship with their child, and 62% noting that their emerging adult helps with household responsibilities. None of the negative consequences are nearly as common, but it is notable that 40% of parents say that they have more financial stress and worry more about their child when living with them. Having an emerging adult living at home means witnessing every up and down of daily life, from an argument with a boyfriend or girlfriend to a bad day at work, and witnessing it all magnifies parents' concerns.

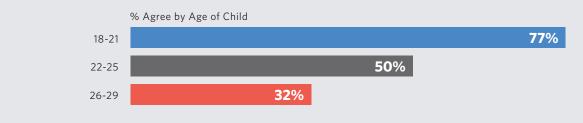
IF YOUR CHILD IS LIVING AT HOME OR HAS MOVED BACK IN: Which of the following are % consequences of your child living with you now? **Parents** I feel closer to my child emotionally. 67 My child helps with household responsibilities. 62 I worry more about my child. 40 29 I have less sexual freedom with my spouse or partner. 27 I have more conflict with my child. 25

Parents recognize that their emerging adults are usually living at home out of economic necessity. The most common reason specified by parents for why their child is living at home is that the child "doesn't make enough money to live independently" (66%). However, 62% say that a reason their grown kid lives at home is that they get along well and their child likes living with them. This living arrangement may not be the nuisance it is made out to be.

IF YOUR CHILD IS LIVING AT HOME OR
HAS MOVED BACK IN: What is the reason
your child lives with you now?%
ParentsDoesn't make enough money to live independently66We get along well and my child likes living here.62Focusing mainly on obtaining education56My child is in a transitional period.40In our culture it is common for grown children to remain at home.31Lost job and/or cannot find a job20

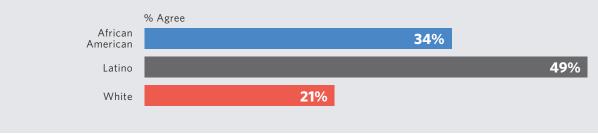
Another common reason for living at home is that the child is focusing on pursuing an education. This reason is especially likely to be named by parents of younger emerging adults (77%), whereas this is much less likely for older emerging adults (32%).

EMERGING ADULT LIVING AT HOME BECAUSE HE/SHE IS "FOCUSING MAINLY ON OBTAINING EDUCATION"



Living at home in emerging adulthood is not notably different between ethnic groups, with Latinos (47%) and African Americans (46%) similar to Whites (40%). However, Latino and African American parents are more likely than Whites to identify cultural values as a reason for their grown kids living at home. Agreement with the statement "in our culture it is common for grown children to remain at home" was 49% for Latino parents, 34% for African American parents, and 21% for White parents.

EMERGING ADULT LIVES AT HOME IN PART BECAUSE "IN OUR CULTURE IT IS COMMON FOR GROWN CHILDREN TO REMAIN AT HOME"



Not only are most parents positive about their grown children living at home, but parents whose kids have moved out view this transition as a mixed blessing. A large majority of parents (84%) say they miss their kids who have moved out. However, parents also perceive a variety of positive consequences when emerging adults move out. Nearly all (90%) of parents are happy that their child is becoming independent. Furthermore, the parents' own lives improve in many ways when children move out, with 61% of parents saying the change allows them to enjoy having more time with their spouse or partner and 60% welcoming the chance to have more time for themselves.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS LIVED OUTSIDE

YOUR HOUSEHOLD: How did you feel about your child leaving home?	% Parents
I was happy that he/she is becoming independent.	90
I missed him/her.	84
I enjoyed having more time with my spouse or partner.	61
I welcomed the chance to have more time for myself.	60
I was concerned that he/she was not ready to be independent.	37
It was a relief because we had less conflict.	31
I felt we were not as close emotionally.	27

CHAPTER SIX

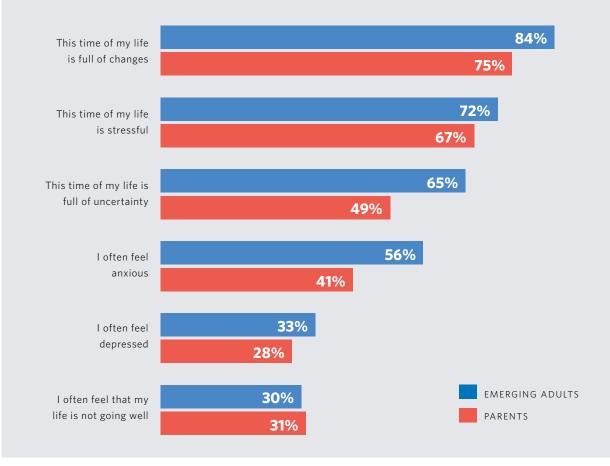
Entering the Post-Parenting Stage of Life When sons and daughters reach emerging adulthood, it marks the beginning of a major phase of transitions, not only for them but for their parents. The parents have been involved in caring for children for at least 18 years (more if there is more than one child in the family), with all the duties that role entails, from changing diapers to helping with homework to driving to soccer practice. Now, at last, parents have the chance to turn their attention back to their own lives. As their children emerge into adulthood, parents often re-emerge into a less taxing, more self-directed stage of life.

Perhaps because of this similarity in the life stage they have now entered, emerging adults and parents are strikingly similar in their appraisals of their lives. Both generally see themselves as being at a good time of life, characterized by freedom, fun, and excitement. A majority of both parents and emerging adults regard their current stage of life as a time to focus on themselves and find out who they really are, although emerging adults are somewhat more likely to agree with these statements. Perhaps most strikingly, 75% of parents of emerging adults agree that they are at a time of life when "it still seems like anything is possible." The parents are generally in their forties, fifties, and sixties, so this statement of their optimism emphasizes that even in midlife most Americans retain a strong belief that they can become what they wish to become.

	% Emerging Adults Agree	% Parents Agree
At this time of my life, it still seems like anything is possible.	89	75
This time of my life is fun and exciting.	85	67
Overall, I am satisfied with my life.	83	82
This is a time of my life for finding out who I really am.	75	59
At this time of my life, I feel I have a great deal of freedom.	74	71
This is a time of my life for focusing on myself.	71	58

However, just as for emerging adults, for their parents, too, life is emotionally complicated. Parents are nearly as likely as emerging adults to report that they often feel anxious or depressed. High proportions of emerging adults feel that their current stage of life is stressful and full of changes and uncertainty, but many parents view their own life stage in these ways as well.

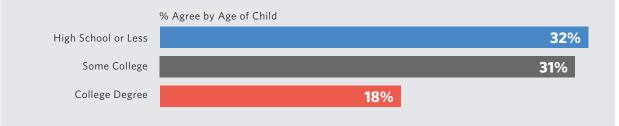
EMERGING ADULTS AND PARENTS BOTH STRUGGLE, BUT EMERGING ADULTS STRUGGLE MORE



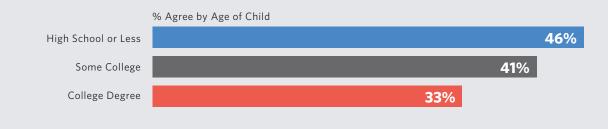
Parents in lower socioeconomic classes have a gloomier view of their current stage of life than other parents do. The less education parents have, the more likely they are to agree that "I often feel depressed" (32% for parents who have a high school education or less, 18% for those who have a college degree or more). The less education parents have, the more likely they are to agree that "I often feel anxious" (46% for parents who have a high school education or less, 33% for those who have a college

degree or more). Similarly, the less education parents have, the more likely they are to agree that "I often feel that my life is not going well" (35% for parents who have a high school education or less, 23% for those who have a college degree or more).

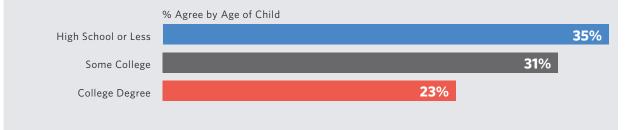
I OFTEN FEEL DEPRESSED



I OFTEN FEEL ANXIOUS



I OFTEN FEEL THAT MY LIFE IS NOT GOING WELL

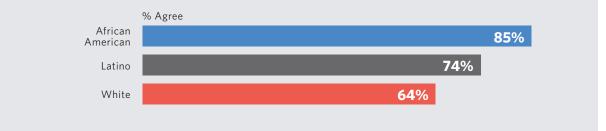


CHAPTER SEVEN

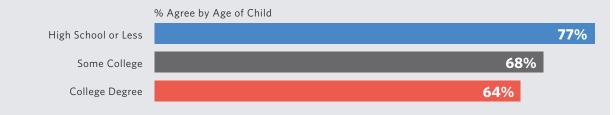
In Dark Times, a Bright Future Although parents often see their emerging adults as struggling, most parents see their kids as having a promising future. More than two-thirds (69%) of parents believe their child's life will be better than their life has been. The emerging adults tend to agree. Results from the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults in 2012 showed that 77% of emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29 believe that overall their life will be better than their parents' lives have been.

However, there are important demographic differences in these trends. African American parents (85%) and Latino parents (74%) are more likely than White parents (64%) to believe that their child's life will be better than their life has been. Also, the less education parents have, the more likely they are to trust that their kids will have a better life. More than three-fourths (77%) of parents with a high school diploma or less believe their child's life will be better than theirs, as compared to 64% of parents with a college degree. Other research has shown that the main reason for the parents' optimism is that they believe their children will get more education than they have been able to obtain. Both parents and emerging adults see education as the ticket to a good adult life. This view is well-founded, given that adults with a college education are estimated to earn over a million dollars more over a lifetime than those who obtained only a high school degree or less. Also, education is correlated with a wide range of other aspects of a good life, from lower rates of divorce and substance abuse to higher life expectancy.

I BELIEVE THAT, OVERALL, MY CHILD'S LIFE WILL BE BETTER THAN MY LIFE HAS BEEN



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The optimism that parents have for their emerging adults, and that emerging adults have for their own lives, is especially striking given that our 2012 survey of emerging adults and 2013 survey of parents took place in the aftermath of the worst recession since the Great Depression, when the United States (and world) had yet to crawl out of the vast pit created by the economic meltdown. One would think that this would be a time of doom and gloom, and that most parents would be lamenting that their kids would never have the same chance at a good life as they did. Yet our survey shows that the American Dream is more resilient than that. Even in hard times, most Americans, young and old, see their children's future as full of promise. Maybe it is not just the American Dream that is resilient, but the belief in the magic of youth. Emerging adults are at a stage of life where they are still on the threshold of making the most important decisions that will shape the course of their adult lives. Their story is not yet written. Today's young people may be entering the adult world at a time that seems inauspicious in many ways, but they, and their parents, retain the confidence that they have the power to find a place in that world that will be rewarding and enjoyable. And who can say they won't? It may be that, by entering adulthood at a time when the economy seems daunting, perhaps ever after in the course of their adult lives, where they are will seem better than where they started.

SOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

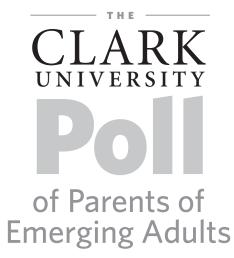
Also see Dr. Arnett's website, jeffreyarnett.com, and the website of the Clark University Poll of Emerging Adults, clarku.edu/clarkpoll. Arnett, J.J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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