

Hot Topics

One of These Things is Not Like The Other: Baby Boomers vs. Millennials March 3, 2013

The Big Idea:

Millennials, or Emerging Adults, are a generation lost in transition; they need older adults to come alongside them and mentor them toward healthy adulthood.

Introduction: Why is this a Hot Topic?

Here enters emerging adulthood...[which] is caused by, entails, and promotes an increasing delay of marriage and childbearing among American youth. This has the effect of increasing the number of years in the American life course during which young (often unmarried and childless) people feel much less need to be religiously involved. And that in turn decreases the number of years—formative ones at that—during which American young people are being actively shaped by public participation in religious traditions.¹



Notes:

This period is not simply an ‘extended adolescence,’ because it is much different from adolescence, much freer from parental control, much more a period of independent exploration. Nor is it really ‘young adulthood,’ since this term implies that an early stage of adulthood has been reached, whereas most young people in their twenties have not made the transitions historically associated with adult status—especially marriage and parenthood—and many of them feel that have not yet reached adulthood. It is a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course, so it requires a new term and a new way of thinking; I call it emerging adulthood.
[Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*]

¹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 79.

Learning Task #1: All in the Family

1A: Examine the following chart which describes the differences between Boomer leadership and Millennial leadership. **Answer** the following question, "Which style resonates with you most?"

Baby Boomers	Millennials
Model: Heroic Visionary	Model: Wounded Healer
Individual Leader	Team Leadership
Positional Authority	Earned Authority
Supervisory	Mentoring and Empowering

Notes:

Emerging Adulthood: Key Terms and Ideas



On Age: Millennials are those individuals born between 1980 and 2000; Boomers are those individuals born between 1946 and 1964.

To Whom Are We Speaking? Emerging adulthood is not simply an extension of teenage life, which normally remains highly dependent on parents and structured by high school. Nor is it the beginning of fully settled adulthood, as marked by marriage, children, career jobs, and home ownership. Rather, emerging adulthood embodies its own distinctive characteristics, tendencies, and experiences.²

² Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 279.

A Developmental Perspective: Many Millennials are presently in the life stage known as Emerging Adulthood (the period of life between 18 and 30). This stage is marked by the 5 D's.³

1. **Disruptions:** Emerging Adults often summarize their lives in one word: transition. They go to college, move home, move out, get a job, lose their job, move home, start grad school, get engaged, break off the engagement, and get a new job.
2. **Distractions:** Millennials have more distractions at their finger tips than any generation before them: the Internet and social media have made this possible. In a permissvie culture, sexual exploration, and drug use is increasingly common in this generation.
3. **Delay:** Emerging Adults are marrying having children later than previous generations, instead pursuing further education and a career. They want to preserve youth as long as possible.
4. **Differentiation:** The challenge every Millennial faces is how to relate to their parents, who are often hovering and helicoptering more than previous parents have done. Many young adults live at home with their parents for longer periods.
5. **Diversity:** Millennials are the children of post-modernism; they see diversity as the highest value, and struggle to think of truth as an objective reality. This diversity extends into Emerging Adults' practice of religion: on every measure available to us, these individuals demonstrate apathy and disregard for religion of all types.



Answer the following question: “What strikes you about this information on emerging adults?” *We’ll use some of the information above in Task 1C.*

Notes:

³ This list is adapted from Christian Smith's *Souls in Transition*.

1B: Examine the following chart, which outlines the differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials. Circle and qualities that are particularly striking to you. **Identify** at least one weakness, and at least one weakness, from each list.

Baby Boomers	Millennials
Autonomy	Community
Conquer & Grow	Connect & Community
Excellence	Authenticity
Seek Expert Advice	Seek Personal Wisdom - Stories
Propositions	Narratives
Performance	Participation
Cognitive & Rational	Holistic & Experiential
Certainty & Clarity	Mystery
Novelty & Progress	Tradition
Unity through Uniformity	Unity within Diversity
Product-Orientation	Process-Orientation
More Textual	More Visual
Social Service	Social Justice
Comfort	Challenge

1C: Answer the following questions as a large group:

- Which of the lists strike you as most biblical? Why do you think?
- What do Boomers have to learn from Millennials, according to this list? What do Millennials have to learn from Boomers?
- Is the Village Church more hospitable to one group over another? What makes you think so?

Notes:

A Closing Word: 'We Need Mentors'



Whether emerging adults recognize it or not, they definitely need models, mentors, and conversation partners with older, more experienced adults who care for and about them—adults other than their parents. The less emerging adults are isolated from older, more mature adults, by being integrated into social worlds other than those created and populated by emerging adults, the better it is for those emerging adults.⁴

1D: Individually, **name** at least one emerging adult you could prayerfully consider mentoring. If you feel so led, **commit** to taking that individual to coffee in the next three weeks.

Notes:

For Further Reading

Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese. *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1999.

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene. *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.

Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville: B&H Books, 2011.

Our Coming Sessions

Dates and Topics Subject to Change

3.10 ~ Depression, Despair, and Doubt with *Bethany Thomas and Jerell Carper*

3.17 ~ No Class!

3.24 ~ Culture and Discernment

3.31 ~ No Class! He is Risen!

4.7 ~ Unfriend Yourself with *Mat Camerer*

⁴ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 241.