

'Emerging Adult' New Term For 20-Somethings

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Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. A research professor of psychology at Clark University, Arnett became fascinated at the different choices 18-to-20-something year olds were making compared to preceding generations. Further research bore out his initial findings: **people 18-29 were delaying their entry into adulthood.**

The book covers issues 18-29 year olds face—parents, love and sex, marriage, college, careers—weaving these together with the stories of real emerging adults. Arnett's narrative is lively, engaging, and informative, based on 10-years' of research in this age group.

I was particularly interested in the chapter, *Sources of Meaning: Religious Beliefs and Values*. Here are some of Arnett's research findings:

This group falls into 4 categories:

agnostic/atheist 22%

deist 28%

liberal believer 27%

conservative believer 23%

58% said their religious beliefs were Very Important or Quite Important.

79% believe a higher power watches over them and guides their lives.

Only **25%** think attending religious services is Very Important or Quite Important; **42%** said Not Important at all

Other observations I found interesting included:

Several students believe that God is like 'The Force' in Star Wars.

Disillusioning or bad church experiences result in anger, resentment, or hostility toward religion.

Emerging adults tend to "personalize" their own religious views by combining or borrowing from other religions or spirituality traditions.

But I found most disturbing this statement describing the correlation between childhood religious training and the current beliefs of emerging adults:

"In statistical analyses, there was no relationship between exposure to religious training in childhood and any aspect of their religious beliefs as emerging adults - not to the current classification as agnostic/atheist, deist, liberal believer, or conservative believer; not to their current attendance at religious services; or the importance of religious beliefs, or the importance of religion in their everyday lives; not to their belief that God or a higher power guides their lives or to the certainty of their religious beliefs in emerging adulthood." p. 174

In other words, childhood religious training appears to have no bearing on religious beliefs or practice when teens reach the emerging adult ages of 18-29.

Reading this book, after reading *Lost and Found* by Stetzer, Stanley and Hayes, I found Arnett's book to be more disturbing, and wondered if Stetzer's book is too optimistic about the success of existing churches with this group of emerging — Stetzer calls them 'younger' — adults.

Emerging Adulthood is published by Oxford University Press, and is intended for use as a textbook, but is highly readable, and not geared just to academics. Churches seeking to engage emerging adults would benefit from reading and discussing *Emerging Adulthood* before attempting ministry to this age group. ★