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Cutting or Maintaining the Cord? Assessing Levels of Parental Involvement in the Lives of Emerging Adults

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Running Title: Cutting or Maintaining the Cord?

Assessing Levels of Parental Involvement in the Lives of Emerging Adults

By

Kelsey Hyde

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Sociology

UNION COLLEGE
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ABSTRACT

HYDE, KELSEY Cutting or Maintaining the Cord? Assessing Levels of Parental Involvement in the Lives of Emerging Adults.
Department of Sociology, June 2015.

ADVISOR: Professor David A. Cotter

For my sociology thesis, I analyzed the concept of “emerging adulthood” with a focus on the shifting role of parental support in the lives of young adults. In doing so, I reviewed the synthesis of this new phrase “emerging adulthood”, now considered by many social scientists to encompass a completely new life course stage. I began with a macro-level analysis of the demographic shifts across multiple generations that differentiate this cohort from others. I then identified characteristics that define emerging adulthood, as well as the currently observed role of parents during this phase. Ultimately, I was interested in uncovering how different levels of parental involvement impact the life goals and objectives of emerging adults. Thus, I focused my own research on two particular groups of emerging adults that I have access to: current Union College seniors and recent Union graduates. Through data from personal interviews and online surveys, I was able to study the ways in which these subjects navigate themselves from collegiate to post-collegiate adulthood with varying degrees of parental support and the impact that such support has on their short-term and long-term goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Emerging Adulthood

What constitutes becoming an “adult”? Is it strictly dependent on reaching a certain age bracket? Is it achieved through more arbitrary terms, such as living alone or having a job of a particular rank or skill level? Or is one an adult when they gain total financial independence? In today’s world, the time at which an individual transitions from the life stage of adolescent to adult has become increasingly difficult to identify. As many social scientists have come to recognize, a new life stage entitled “emerging adulthood” has surfaced to label those who no longer qualify as children or adolescents, but, for various reasons, do not appear to qualify as full-fledged adults (Arnett 2015). Individuals who fit in this category come from a variety of different ages and backgrounds and currently find themselves in many unique situations. Some are recent college graduates returning to their childhood homes, searching for employment or saving on rent costs in preparation for their next step in life. Others are living in a separate location, but still acquiring parental assistance to make ends meet. Regardless of each particular circumstance, the precise moment that adulthood officially begins has become a volatile benchmark in American society that seems to constantly move farther and farther out of reach for young people.

1.1 Generation Who?

To further understand this current ambiguity in entering adulthood, it is important to note the cross-generational shifts that distinguish this generation in relation to others. To assess such shifts, it is crucial to know *who* exactly composes each of the generations in question. As Jean Twenge identified in her study *Generation Me*, labeling the generations is somewhat problematic since such classification creates arbitrary cutoffs for social phenomenon that cannot be quantified. For instance, someone born at the very end of one generation probably relates more with a person born a year after them in the next generation rather than someone twenty years their senior (Twenge 2014). However, the most commonly employed cutoffs classify “Baby Boomers” as those born from about 1943-1960, “Generation X” as 1961-1981, and “Millennials”, whom she also refers to as “Generation Y” and “GenMe”, as 1982-1999. Thus, being in the 2010’s, this categorization places “GenMe” to be those currently in their teens to mid-thirties (Twenge 2014). Now, what makes these generations, each with their own name and specified list of members, so different from the others? There exist numerous qualitative and quantitative avenues for such comparison.

1.2 Demographic Shifts

One notable trend that has varied across these generations is the age of first marriage. In 1960, the median age for marriage was 20.3 for women and 22.8 for men. These ages rose slightly in the 1970’s, followed by a drastic shift into the millennium. By 2010, this age had risen to 26 for women and over 28 for men, amounting to a six-year rise over four decades that continues to grow (Arnett 2015). Additionally, only 20% of young adults ages 18 to 29 are currently married,

compared to 59% of this same age group in 1960 (Twenge 2014). This delay in marriage also has had an effect on other distinguishing attributes of the generations, such as average age of entering parenthood. Thus, people are waiting longer to get married and start a family than they have in previous generations, leaving more time between adolescence and such major milestones and contributing to the development of the new life stage between youth and adulthood (Arnett 2015).

In addition to postponing family formation, the rate at which young people are returning to live with their immediate family has risen dramatically. As Katherine Newman discovered in her study of *The Accordion Family*, almost 60% of young adults, age 18-34, in the United States were living with their parents in 2005 (Newman 2012). To look at a wider range of adults, a 2009 study by the American Association of Retired Persons revealed that about one third of the respondents ages 18 to 49 reported living with their parents or in-laws. Overall, Newman noted that a much higher proportion of adult children live with their parents now than any other time since the 1950's, and these percentages continue to rise (Newman 2012). Twenge had similar discoveries in her studies of GenMe, finding that about 36% of GenMe'ers, ages 18-31, live with their parents. Within this group, 56% were between the ages of 18 and 24. As many respondents reported, a majority of their high school class had returned home. Some respondents also were very aware of the difference between their current situation and their parents' experiences, noting that their parents had already established a home and acquired the financial independence to support themselves by the time they were of this age (Twenge 2014). In addition to higher rates of returning home, this generation showed more

varied living arrangements in general than previous generations. Previous generations were characterized as being quick to marry, and then leave home to live with their respective spouse. Conversely, it has become more common for this generation to live independently before marriage, exhibiting many different living arrangements, such as living with roommates or living completely alone, before officially “settling down” (Settersten 2012).

Closely related to this “boomerang” effect of returning home in young adulthood, along with combinations of other varied living arrangements, rates of home ownership amongst young adults have dropped significantly, mostly due to lack of affordable housing. As a result, only 23% of Americans under age 25 own their own homes (Newman 2012). This low ownership rate is reflected in the trends in home prices. In 1970, the median home price was about three times the median household income. There was a huge spike in the housing market during the 2000’s, when most of the current young adult homeowners would have been buying their homes, where the median house price was six times the median household incomes. The housing market crash that followed then caused these rates to drop to be about four times the median income, but the ramifications of the crash have caused foreclosures and diminished house worth and these consequences have particularly affected young adults (Twenge 2014). The process of renting, the more common route for younger adults, is an equally formidable task. By 2009, about 25% of renters were spending over half their income on rent, compared to only 12% of renters having to pay more than half their income in 1960 (Twenge 2014). In addition to those who part with half their income for housing costs, there are those

who simply do not have an income. Unemployment especially affects Americans ages 20-24 with a rate of 13.4%, twice as high as the unemployment rate for those ages 25-54 (Twenge 2014).

As an overall result of these hardships currently affecting young adults, they are more dependent, financially and housing-wise, on their parents and for a longer period of time than their own parents were at that same point in their lives. As Arnett found in his Clark study of emerging adults, 44% of 18-29 year-olds receive “frequent support when necessary” or “regular support for living expenses” from their parents. This reliance on parents is highest during the beginnings of young adulthood, with 89% of 18-21 year-olds receiving at least occasional support. This tendency does wane as one gets older, with 56% of 26-29 year-olds receiving at least occasional support, but this still represents a very substantial percentage of young adults not being completely cut-off from their parents (Arnett 2015).

Thus, the 20s have become a much more volatile age for young adults today than in previous generations. As Arnett notes, “In prior decades, the 20s were relatively predictable: young people finished their education, moved out of their parents’ household, got married, and had their first children all in a short period of time, usually by about age 25. The neat and expected sequencing of the age period, however, has faded” (Arnett *et al.* 2011: 13). Clearly, the more traditional checkmarks towards adulthood and the numbered-ages associated with them have shifted.

1.3 Moral Alterations

In addition to these quantitative comparisons of the generations, another source of stark contrast exists in the varying belief systems and moral philosophies of each generation. As Twenge noted in her studies of GenMe, the ingrained sense of formality and social rules of previous decades have all but disappeared. Even the simple act of getting dressed to face the world every day is a “fundamentally different experience than it was fifty years ago” (Twenge 2014: 21). The formal ideas of appropriate dress have been replaced with ideas of comfort and self-expression, and the loosening of rules in appearance is reflective of other choices as well. Instead of adhering to a larger social order, there is now a greater emphasis on individuality that allows one to make their own choices without the approval of others in society. This mindset is furthered by the very common advice to “just be yourself” (Twenge 2014).

In his study of the difficulties of emerging adulthood, Christian Smith identified a similar loosening of social order in aspects of morality. He discovered a new tendency of young adults to simply not have an opinion on what is right and wrong, instead preaching a convoluted sense of “tolerance” that leaves them unable and unwilling to judge the beliefs and actions of others. He refers to this philosophy as “moral individualism” and notes its similarities to the philosophy of moral relativism- the belief that there do not exist absolute moral truths that bind everyone, but rather that everything is subjective to circumstance, culture, or timing. Ultimately, the emerging adults in his study identified moral rights and wrongs as “a personal choice” and “entirely a matter of individual decision” (Smith

2011:27-28). Jeffrey Arnett also recognized this self-focused belief system in his study “Emerging Adulthood”. He specifies that, “individualism means guiding moral decisions on the basis of what is believed to be best for promoting individual growth, freedom, and personal development” (Arnett 2015: 212).

Closely related to the topic of morality are those of religious beliefs and participation. As Arnett notes in his discussion of individualism, such a belief system can exist without a religious basis and, in the case of many emerging adults, it usually does. Young people today are much less religious than those of older generations, with more than a third of young adults (age 18-29) reporting “no affiliation”, compared to less than 10% of people over 65, 15% of people age 50-64, and 20% of people age 30-49 (Arnett 2015). Additional interviews following these statistical findings also revealed that some young adults who might consider themselves “affiliated” don’t actually practice regularly or hold very strong beliefs based on their religion. Attendance rates reflect this trend, where less than 20% of the Millennial generation attends weekly services (Arnett 2015). Smith also uncovered similar quasi-religious sentiments among the young adults he interviewed. About 40% claimed that their moral views were somehow based on religious beliefs, but as a more general influence that exists in the background of their lives, rather than a strict adherence to the moral system of their respective religions (Smith 2011). Thus, these trends in religious affiliation and “loosening” of values reveal a major shift in morality across the generations.

1.4 The Bigger Picture

As many researchers have noted, these generation gaps can be attributed to macro-social changes that have occurred over the last half-decade of American history. Social scientists each point to different movements that they feel have most contributed to the current status of young adults. In his study of emerging adults, Christian Smith identifies the dramatic growth in higher education as one such movement that has reshaped the current road to adulthood. As he notes, there has been a drastic increase in the pursuit of higher education, resulting in many young adults extending their formal schooling well into their 20's, and even continuing to pursue more professional education that could trickle on into their 30's (Smith 2011). About 70% of young Americans now continue their education beyond high school, as opposed to 30% in 1950 and 50% in 1980 (Arnett 2015). Comparatively, in 1950, relatively few people in any country obtained any higher education, and most young people remained in their parents' household until they married and entered parenthood, usually in their late teens or very early 20s. Thus, most young people went directly from adolescence to a settled young adulthood by their early 20s (Arnett *et al.* 2011).

Also, greater participation in higher education has resulted in a shift toward earlier home leaving in order to live in non-family settings, such as living at college, but has also been associated with more frequent returns to live with parents (Mortimer and Reed 2002). As such, it is evident this greater emphasis on higher education in young adulthood has contributed to many of the aforementioned generational shifts, such as the delaying of marriage and parenthood or residential

independence, as young adults are postponing other commitments until receiving these advanced degrees (Arnett 2015). Indeed, young adults seeking higher education ultimately can view these statuses of marriage and parenthood as major impediments to finishing a degree or other training that can help ensure success in the labor market (Settersten 2012).

Economic shifts of the United States have clearly had an immediate and direct effect on the American job market, but globalization and its effect on the job market is another such change that has drastically altered the working world in which young adults are currently trying to enter. Smith characterizes this globalization as “changes in the American and global economy that undermine stable, lifelong careers and replace them instead with careers with low security, more frequent job changes, and an ongoing need for new training and higher education” (Smith 2011). This growing competition and instability in employment has caused more young adults to diversify their skills, either through pursuing more advanced degrees or experimenting in many different fields to gain further experience (Smith 2011). Indeed, this has made the pursuit for higher education more necessary than ever before based on the new necessity of a college degree to attain a “decent” standard of living (Settersten 2012).

However, despite these efforts, global competition in job markets has hit young adults particularly hard. In today’s knowledge economy, even a college degree does not always guarantee a stable job, wages, or benefits (Settersten 2012). Despite levels of education, simply being the newer entrants into the job market, these young adult workers are the first to experience increased competition to keep

their positions, as well as the harsh cut of wages, based on their lack of seniority in the workplace. As a result of these economic pressures, young adults are struggling to maintain employment and a stable paycheck, two major factors that affect their ability to attain residential independence (Newman 2012). These results were reflected in the earlier findings on unemployment rates and incomes, as well as the widespread “residential retreat home” of young adults moving back in with their parents. Indeed, the return of young adults to their parents’ homes do mostly reflect their inability to support themselves, seeing as the percentage of people between 25 and 34 in poverty in 2009 was 9%, and their poverty rate would instead have been an estimated 43% if they had not been living with their parents (Settersten 2012). In addition, threats to employment also have affected family formation, as it takes longer today to secure a full-time job that pays enough to support a family (Settersten 2012). As such, these employment and income trends also reflect in the ages of marriage and entry to parenthood.

Another huge change in the American social landscape has been the Sexual Revolution. The invention of the birth control pill in 1964 can be attributed to sparking this movement by allowing young people to enter into sexual relationships without the prospect of marriage or children (Arnett 2015). Since the 1960’s, the variety, reliability, ease, and accessibility of birth control methods have widely increased. As a result, the disconnect between sexual relations, marriage, and procreation has grown over the latter half of the decade, which has had an effect on the cultural norms surrounding sex for today’s young adults (Smith 2011). Overall, “less stringent standards of sexual morality” have developed, creating a wider

tolerance for premarital sexual relationships amongst young people in their late teens and twenties (Arnett 2015).

Related to the Sexual Revolution is the Woman's Movement in the 1960s and 1970s that reshaped the cultural norms for women entering adulthood. Young women in the 1950s and 1960s had vastly different goals than the young women of today. First, one of their prime objectives was to find a husband. Most women didn't attend college, but those who did were quipped as only being after the "M-r-s" degree, showing that this pursuit for a husband really transcended all aspects of life (Arnett 2015). Even those who did actually pursue an education were met with a limited range of occupations they could actually practice, such as being a teacher, nurse, or secretary. Moreover, work was supposed to come second to being a good wife and mother (Arnett 2015). The income acquired by women in the household was understood to be for extra expenses, not for supporting the family. Moreover, the concept of upward mobility in a female's profession was virtually non-existent (Newman 2012).

Fast-forwarding to the 21st Century, these restrictive cultural expectations for those of the female gender have all but disappeared. Women are now more likely to graduate from college than men, with 57% of undergraduates being female, and they now have an extensive array of job opportunities waiting for them upon graduation. Additionally, the expectation to marry and procreate by a certain age has all but vanished, leaving women more freedom to enjoy their 20s without such societal pressures (Arnett 2015). Thus, the extension of opportunity and choice for young women today are reflected in the previously viewed trends of marriage and

parenthood ages that had once placed women into motherhood in the first few years of their twenties, but now are allowing them to explore other opportunities before settling down and starting a family. However, this inclusion also introduces women to the instability and lack of concrete direction that has come to characterize the experience of young adults.

1.5 Defining Emerging Adulthood

After understanding how and why young adults today are different than their predecessors, what are the ramifications of such changes? As a result of these macro changes in the American social landscape, a new life-course stage has developed, entitled “emerging adulthood”. Professor Jeffrey Arnett has been accredited as the father of this term “emerging adulthood”, and rightfully so as he not only first coined the term, but has vehemently asserted the various reasons why other terms that try to identify this new life course are insufficient and misleading (Arnett 2015). He depicts the results of macro level societal changes as opening a window in the life course that allows emerging adulthood to take form, describing how,

“A half-century ago most people entered these roles at age 20-22, placing them in ‘young adulthood’ right after adolescence, with adult responsibilities... Now that the median ages of entering marriage and parenthood have moved into the late 20s or even early 30s, a stage of emerging adulthood has opened up between adolescence and young adulthood during which people are more independent of their parents than they were as adolescents but have not yet entered the roles that structure adult life for most people.” (Arnett et al. 2011: 49)

Thus, Arnett defines emerging adulthood as a life stage with distinctive demographic characteristics, but with many possible paths to take within this stage

pertaining to one's individual education, employment, moral beliefs, self-development, and relationships. Ultimately, this stage is characterized by "longer and more widespread education, later entry to marriage and parenthood, and a prolonged and erratic transition to stable work", all of which have created space in the life course for this new stage between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett 2015).

Other social scientists have also recognized Arnett's classification of this new phase in the course of American youth. After conducting numerous personal interviews with young adults about their experiences moving towards adulthood, Smith similarly concluded that, "Emerging adulthood is at heart about postponing settling down into real adulthood... In its pure form it is about spending a long period unmarried, without children, and not settled into a real career or residence" (Smith 2011: 231).

Additionally, Arnett identifies more descriptive qualities that further distinguish this life stage from adolescence and adulthood. He pinpoints five main features to be: (1) identity explorations in "search for the self"; (2) instability in love, work, and residence; (3) self-focus and lack of obligation to others; (4) the feeling of being "in-between" and in constant transition; and (5) optimism in possibilities. These five features in varying degrees combine to form a life stage filled with challenges, opportunity, and uncertainty (Arnett 2015).

How do these five features manifest themselves, as seen by the aforementioned generational shifts that differentiate young adults today? Most notably, the shifting ages of "firsts", as identified earlier, reflect the concept of being self-focused and not feeling obligated to others. Young adults are much more likely

to work to first create a life for themselves before attempting to assume responsibility for others. Instead of the previous idea of couples joining to build a life together, young adults now choose to build their own lives, and then marry and start a family (Settersten 2012). This can be an important time for “personal growth”, which focuses much on the self and causes one to refrain from taking on responsibilities for others (Mortimer and Reed 2002). Instability in work and residence has definitely been exhibited through the ever-changing employment and residential status of emerging adults. That is, they are constantly moving- from home to college, college to home, home to a new home with new cohabitants, etc. This same constant transition is also experienced in the workforce, and is sometimes referred to as “turbulence”, characterized by frequent job changes and periods of unemployment (Mortimer and Reed 2002).

Moreover, this life stage is unique in the ways in which it is *not* like the adolescence that precludes it, and the full-fledged adulthood that succeeds it. Emerging adulthood is seen as a period of “semi-autonomy” where young adults have more autonomy than they did in adolescence, but have not quite acquired the full autonomy that comes with adulthood (Arnett *et al.* 2011). However, it is the constant motion towards autonomy that encompasses the idea of “emerging” adulthood, rather than just an extended adolescence or young adulthood. Arnett notes how important it is to recognize the constant transitions during this life phase that separate it from its side-ends; specifically, the transitions that incorporate changes in identities, roles, and statuses that are within the awareness of the individual and other members of society (Arnett *et al.* 2011).

Although much of identifying this life course is through the previously stated demographics and generational patterns, this new stage of emerging adulthood is particularly unique based on these more qualitative classifications. That is, emerging adulthood is more distinctive because of the ways in which it *doesn't* coincide simply with quantitative markers or life checkpoints, such as reaching a certain age or achieving a particular marital status, but instead with a multifaceted classification that is unique to each situation. Arnett recognizes that, "It has become increasingly obsolete to use traditional 'markers' of adulthood- such as leaving home, completing your education, finding a job, and starting a family of your own- to determine whether an individual as reached adulthood" (Arnett *et al.* 2011: 55). As Newman similarly identifies through her interviews with young adults who are residentially dependent on their parents, the concept of "adulthood" is no longer set by such defined achievements that one could check off like a grocery list. Rather, "... adulthood is this kind of feeling or process much more than a rigid set of milestones" (Newman 2012: 5). In comparison to generations past, this has translated from a concrete timeline of adulthood to a more conceptual definition. Newman recognizes this shift away from a checklist of adult assets, asserting instead that "those days of status transitions- clear, publicly recognized steps toward autonomy, residential independence, and the birth of a new family- have given way to a more psychological perspective; you are an adult when you feel like one" (Newman 2012: 5).

Smith also recognized the ways in which emerging adulthood has altered and further complicated the act of defining adulthood by identifying its constant movement and lack of stability:

“Emerging adulthood as a social fact means not making commitments, not putting down roots, not setting a definite course for the long term... It is about experimenting, exploring, experiencing, preparing, anticipating, having fun, and hopefully not screwing things up too badly in the meantime. Emerging adulthood entails few significant obligations, relatively little accountability to others, and (for those with the means) plenty of interesting detours and escape hatches. It is a time of limbo, of transition, of being neither a teen nor a real adult. Emerging adults can be unsure, can change their minds, can give things a shot, and can try something else if it doesn’t work out. Again, this reality is driven by personal choices, but also by the social-structural forces that make those choices seem sensible for many emerging adults” (Smith 2011: 231).

Such observations of the complex and transient nature of emerging adulthood reflect the emphasis on personal choice and self-expression that place this generation in a completely different school of thought than generations past. As such, the markers for reaching adulthood have similarly become individualistic, focusing on such self-described concepts of “accepting responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and attaining financial independence” (Arnett *et al.* 2011: 35).

1.6 The Role of Parents in the Lives of Emerging Adults

After assessing this new life course of emerging adulthood and its portrayal in today’s generation, it is important to consider another group affected by this new life course: the parents of emerging adults. Indeed, most of the distinctions made concerning emerging adulthood and the transition to full adulthood are concerning an individual’s dependence on their parents. For instance, residential independence

has been a large source of comparison amongst today's youth and generations before them. The reason there is so much attention to young adults living at home rests on the fact that leaving home has traditionally been the surest sign of *independence*- and independence has, in turn, traditionally been the surest sign of *adulthood* (Settersten 2012). However, as seen in the previous discussions of the disparities between housing and the greatly diminished economic opportunities for emerging adults, it has often become necessary for emerging adults to return home, at least temporarily.

Then, for some youth and their parents, living at home is a smart, often mutual, choice and strategy that can allow young people to focus on working towards degrees and gaining important experiences that will help them in the job market (Settersten 2012). In this way, parents have been accounted as playing the functions of "safety-net" and "scaffold". That is, they act as a fallback to offer help in times of great need or in light of negative life events, "catching them" when they are in fear of failing. They also can offer more temporary support to ease certain burdens for their children, essentially "propping them up" while they search to acquire greater human capital, such as continuing education and increasing employment experience (Mortimer 2012).

However, regardless of these occurrences and the willingness of parents to help in this way, what exactly characterizes the actual obligations and responsibilities of parents in the lives of emerging adults? During childhood, the duties and requirements are fairly formalized. There are hard-set laws about neglect during childhood in which the state can intervene when certain needs are not met

by a child's parents (Osgood and Siennick 2012). These obligations to provide certain material needs, needs that are crucial to human well-being such as food, shelter, clothing, physical safety, and basic medical care, are among the fundamental interests of children and their development. Thus, there is little controversy about the obligation of parents to ensure these basic needs are met (Michael 2007).

Apart from these legal, more tangible requirements, there are general moral obligations often associated with parenthood. Ultimately, one important moral obligation that rests with parents is the duty to help their children become autonomous. This entails that parents will engage in behavior to enable their child to mature and minimize elements of dependency that take away from autonomy. Such elements could include ignorance to the consequences of certain choices or emotional instability. As such, this requires the extension of both formal and informal education to their children in order to promote autonomy (Michael 2007). As parents increase their child's ability to become more self-sufficient, the parent-child relationship evolves from a pattern of child dependence on parents to a relationship that closer resembles one between two adults characterized by greater equality. This change in the parent-child relationship is recognized by emerging adults as one of the most important markers in becoming an adult (Arnett et. al 2011). Moreover, the ability of emerging adults to transition well into full-fledged adulthood is accredited mostly to the ability of parents to raise their children in such a way that they have sufficient means to experience significant well-being in adulthood (Michael 2007).

Based on these moral obligations to ensure their child's success in transitioning and sustaining well-being in adulthood, there are commonly held beliefs that parents who have the power to give their children greater experiences or educational opportunities that will enhance a greater well-being ought to do so (Michael 2007). As such, these obligations, more commonly recognized as applying to parents with children in their earlier stages of development, are now being extended to parents with children navigating the road to adulthood (Mortimer 2012). For example, the obligation to ensure children are educated sufficiently enough to enable them to be a well-functioning member of society has a drastically new meaning in today's world where a college degree, and even more extended forms of higher education, has grown more necessary to sustain a decent standard of living. As noted by Austin Michael in his studies of ethics in parenthood,

"Parents are morally obligated to provide their children with a level of education sufficient to enable them to function in society and support themselves financially... Greater levels of formal education give one more options, and, because of this, one of the obligations that a parent has as a steward of the adult that their child becomes is to provide that child with enough education such that they have a significant range of options open to them when they take control of their life as an adult." (Michael 2007: 123)

However, this extended level of parental involvement in supporting their child further into their young adulthood has been cited as having a negative affect on their development as an adult. Such terms as "helicopter parenting" have surfaced to describe parents who are perceived as being too involved in the lives of their young adult children. Such behavior is compared to "hovering" in the sense that they are overly present in their child's life, in a physical or mental context. Some

parents do so through requiring constant contact and disclosure, or even in more forceful ways by intervening with their children's college professors or administrators (Mortimer 2012). Some people perceive this extended existence of parental support as detrimental to the independence of young adults. Indeed, the case can be made that parental help can have mixed effects, helping a young adults in need when they cannot stand on their own, but also inhibiting their ability to develop their sense of independence and economic self-sufficiency, and therefore learn how to stand on their own (Michael 2007).

However, most social scientists and those more aware of the macro-level factors on young adulthood today recognize the necessity of parental support in this current world where increased education is more essential, where marriage and spousal support is much more delayed, and other influences make independence very difficult to achieve without help (Mortimer 2012). Moreover, the "norms" that some people use to classify this dependence as detrimental do not take in the reality of these limited opportunities, and appear to display a disconnect between what defines self-sufficiency and dependence (Osgood and Siennick 2012). One of the key indicators of the help or harm of such support is the degree to which the support offered is linked to roles associated with future attainments, such as aiding a child during their status as a student in order to attain a higher status post-grad, and the degree to which such support contributes to future success (Fingerman *et al.* 2012). Typically, this support can be seen as beneficial as long as there is some degree of this "forward motion" (Newman 2012).

In conjunction to teaching their children to become autonomous, another crucial role of parents in young adulthood is the emotional support offered in making life and career choices. Parents can teach this important life skill by offering a model of their own views of a good life and how they have come to make their own decisions, as well as offering emotional support to children in making these decisions (Michael 2007). Closely related is the idea of “self-efficacy”. Self-efficacy involves the young adult’s personal evaluation of their ability to organize themselves and manage future scenarios, which in turn majorly affects one’s aspirations, expectations, and achievements (Settersten 2012). Such self-evaluation has been shown to be very influenced by parental levels of financial support and emotional support, since their evaluation of their ability to succeed is directly impacted by how much of their success has been accomplished independent of others (Mortimer 2012).

Although young adults can still receive parental support in making major life choices, an important aspect to consider is the degree to which parents eventually leave their children the room to choose their own, potentially different, path (Michael 2007). This is reflected in the process of career-orientation and goals for employment.

1.7 Career-Oriented Goals and Employment

As the turning point between adolescence and adulthood, many major life decisions are usually made during emerging adulthood. As such, emerging adulthood is a critical developmental stage during which individuals select life goals based on available resources and opportunities. This involves the crucial process by

which life goals are narrowed, eliminated, and refined. As such, being able to articulate and select goals, direct one's resources to achieve those goals, and evaluate one's success in meeting identified goals are vital skills acquired during emerging adulthood (Arnett *et al.* 2011). These skills in goal orientation then lead into the more complex process of developing long-term plans. Personal, long-term plans become clearer and more differentiated for young adults as they approach full-time adulthood. In addition to identifying goals, these plans rely on learning one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as relevant interests, in order to identify the options available that match such attributes and the most productive ways in which to access them (Settersten 2012). This "planfulness" is majorly affected by input from peers, mentors, teachers, and parents. (Settersten 2012). Although there has been research to indicate that parents have a major influence on this ability to make plans, this leaves much to consider about the degree to which parents influence the actual plans themselves.

1.8 The Big Question

Evidently, the road to adulthood is characterized by many twists and turns and extended help from others, namely parents, which shape the subsequent life stage of full-fledged adulthood that follows. The degree to which parents provide financial and emotional support to their young adult children during this time period has been clearly indicated through other studies, but to what degree does this level of parental involvement influence the choices that young adults make regarding their employment and life-long goals? I chose to focus my research on the level of parental involvement in the lives emerging adults and its potential influence

on career orientation and life-long goals for three specific groups of emerging adults- a group just about to enter post-graduate life, a group who has most immediately entered post-graduate life, and a group that has been experiencing post-graduate life for a few years. To do so, I conducted a combination of interviews and surveys that identified the financial and residential independence of the young adults in my study, as well as their current employment status and current career objectives. These questions also work to assess the relationship between these young adults and their parents, and the extent to which they believe the degree of such relationships has influenced their current situation and current goals.

Chapter 2: Methods

2.1 Modes of Analysis: Surveys and Personal Interviews

As my research focused on the level of parental involvement in the lives of emerging adults, I chose to perform a combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses of a particular subset of the young adult population. I first distributed online surveys, mostly concerned with numerical measures of adulthood and parental involvement. To supplement these more quantitative questionnaires, I also conducted more in-depth interviews to survey participants who volunteered to answer further questions. These surveys and interviews focused on identifying the self-perceived independence of these young adults, as well as their current employment status and career objectives. These questions also work to assess the relationship between these young adults and their parents, and the extent to which they believe their relationship has influenced their present and future lives, in particular their levels of overall independence and their development of career goals.

I chose to look at three particular groups of emerging adults, each composing a unique subset of the young adult population. I believed the three groups I selected would present interesting and pertinent information for my analysis based on my previous research on current trends used to define “emerging adulthood”. First, I wanted to focus on a group currently viewed to be on the “brink” of adulthood—current college seniors. These seniors represent young adults, roughly age 21 to 23, that are about to complete their formal collegiate education, which is a milestone

discussed frequently when attempting to define adulthood. For instance, as previously discussed, college graduation rates are frequently referenced as a major varying factor between different generations. Also, the current job market has been noted to require higher qualifications for even entry-level positions, making a college degree increasingly necessary. In addition, although adulthood legally begins at age 18, college is routinely seen as a stepping-stone between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood where students undergo a greatly transformative socialization process, learning to live on their own and manage their own time, while still heavily relying on parental support. As such, I believed that studying the current situations of these young adults about to achieve an increasingly required degree, and finish these four crucial years of socialization, would prove to be very interesting and informative. The college seniors that I had the greatest access to, the class of 2015 at Union College, were also in a very unique position at the time of my study. Based on the trimester schedule, these seniors still had many weeks to go before graduation and as a result, they were still making their decisions regarding post-collegiate activity. My analysis of this group mainly focused on the level of parental involvement in the lives of these college seniors, as well as their current career objectives and post-graduation plans.

After looking at this group on the verge of leaving the collegiate world, I chose to then study the group who had most recently left this arena- the Class of 2014. I wanted to focus on this group for reasons similar to my interest in current seniors, because they compose the group of individuals who were seniors less than a year ago and have most recently earned their degree. As such, I was very

interested to study this group of young-adults to see what characterizes the lives of those in the post-collegiate world, immediately following graduation. In particular, I focused on their latest activity since graduation, including their employment, short-term and long-term goals, and the level of parental involvement now in comparison to when they were undergrads.

The third and final group I studied for my analysis was composed of individuals who have been navigating the post-collegiate world for a few years- the Class of 2010. Ranging from about age 25 to 27, these graduates represent a subset of the population that, in comparison to previous generations, are still considered to be in the midst of securing themselves as adults and are very much still encompassing “emerging adulthood”. I was very interested to see how these young adults characterized themselves as adults, and how their development and success of career objectives, along with levels of parental involvement, did or did not differ from the other two groups.

To achieve measures for these three groups, my online survey was distributed via email to members of the Union College Class of 2010, 2014, and 2015. Respondents were informed beforehand of their rights regarding participation, and were required to provide consent before taking part in the survey. I had two separate editions of these surveys- one for current seniors and one for alumni (see Appendix A & B for the complete surveys).

The survey directed towards seniors focused primarily on their future plans, as well as the current level of involvement of their parents. I first asked about their employment plans upon graduation, such as job prospects or continuing education,

and where they currently are in the process of solidifying these plans. In addition to their expected employment status, there were questions regarding their expected residential status, including whom they plan to live with and how they plan to support their living expenses. I also asked about their financial status in general, including their ability to pay for extra expenses and loans, and to what extent they rely on parental support. Then, I had many questions concerning their relationship with their parents in general, as well as the level of involvement their parents have had in their academic career and development of future plans. Finally, I had several questions regarding how one is qualified as “an adult” and whether or not it could be based on achieving certain statuses, or by reaching a certain age.

The survey for alumni was very similar to the one for seniors in that it inquired a great deal about their financial and residential status, parental involvement, and perceptions regarding the definition of adulthood. However, specific questions were tailored to account for the major differences between alumni and seniors, namely since they have already graduated and thus already have relevant post-graduate experiences in addition to future goals. For instance, instead of asking about expected status upon graduation, I asked alumni about their current employment, financial, and residential statuses, as well as the involvement of parents in their post-graduate lives.

The responses to these surveys were recorded online via Google Docs and, upon completion, respondents were provided with my information and asked to contact me if they were willing to answer further questions. Based on some participants expressing their interest in completing such interviews, I was able to

gather more qualitative responses to supplement the information achieved from the surveys (See Appendix C & D for the complete set of interview questions). My questions for the interviews also related to status of employment, financial and residential independence, as well as parental involvement and qualifications for adulthood. However, these interviews allowed participants to offer more in-depth descriptions that provided further context for their current status, such as career objectives, future plans, and perceived independence. This also provided respondents with greater freedom to define qualifications for “adulthood” in their own terms and not restricted by the options in a survey. As such, this combination of personal interviews and online surveys provided me with both qualitative and quantitative measures of my major variables of interest regarding the status of these three groups of emerging adults, as well as their perceived qualifications for adulthood and how they themselves do or do not qualify as “adult”.

2.2 Demographic Distributions of Survey Participants

Seniors

As seen in table 2.1, the sample of students from the Senior survey did not have an even distribution amongst genders, with about 70% female and 30% male. The division of majors (see Table 2.2) was fairly even, with equal distribution between sciences (SET) and the social sciences. There were much fewer majors in the humanities, but there were a great amount of Interdisciplinary and Double Majors. This category indicated that students were either an ID-major, or they indicated a double major in which their two majors were from different disciplines. Double Majors whose two majors were within the same discipline were classified as

that discipline. As such, there were very few strictly humanities majors, but even amounts of social science and SET majors. Looking to parental education levels (Table 2.3), the majority of seniors had two parents with at least a Bachelor’s Degree, with a large portion getting Master’s and Doctorate’s, indicating that a majority of these respondents come from well-educated households. Finally, the geographic distribution of hometowns (Table 2.4) reveals that an overwhelming majority of the respondents come from states in the Northeast and a select few come from states in other regions (California, Florida, Illinois, Tennessee, and Minnesota). As such, the results can be expected to reflect these measures for the Northeast and the bias towards this region. In addition to all of these factors, it should also be noted that my sample for the Class of 2015 was very small. From a class of roughly 500 students, I was hoping for about 100 responses. I received only 61 responses from this group of seniors, which is not an ideal sample size as it is significantly smaller than my population of interest. As such, consideration should be made to this small sample size when assessing the results from the survey.

Table 2.1. Survey Respondents by Gender

Gender	
Female	69.5%
Male	30.5%

Note: n = 61

Table 2.2. Survey Respondents by Major

Major	
Humanities	6.8%
ID/Double Major	25.4%
SET	33.9%
Social Sciences	33.9%

Notes: n = 61

Humanities = English, Philosophy, Foreign Languages

ID = Interdisciplinary

Double Major = Two Majors from Different Fields

SET = Natural Sciences, Engineering, Technology

Social Sciences = Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, History,
Political Science, Other Cultural Studies

Table 2.3. Respondents' Parents' Highest Level of Education

Highest Level of Education	Parent 1	Parent 2
High School	15.3%	13.6%
Associate's Degree	6.8%	8.5%
Bachelor's Degree	33.9%	39%
Master's Degree	27.1%	20.3%
Doctorate	16.9%	18.6%

Note: n = 61

Table 2.4. Respondents' Geographic Region of Origin

Geographic Region	
Northeast	89.8%
Southeast	5.1%
West	1.7%
Midwest	3.4%
Southwest	0%

Notes: n = 61

Northeast = Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut,
Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine

Alumni

Next, we look at the distribution of these demographic variables for the alumni. Although slightly better than the Seniors, I again received an uneven distribution of responses based on gender, with 60% female and 40% male (Table 2.5). The division of majors (Table 2.6) again showed a low number of humanities majors, 8.9%, but this group was more uneven in its other distributions, with a

majority in the social sciences at about 44%, then an almost even split of the remaining, 26% in SET, and 21% as ID/Double Major. Then, the parental education levels (Table 2.7) also showed a great majority of respondents had two parents with at least a Bachelor’s Degree, and a fair amount with Master’s and Doctorate’s as well, again indicating that a majority of the participants come from well-educated households. Finally, the geographic distribution of the alumni (Table 2.8) is slightly more varied than the seniors, representing all U.S. regions and including some international hometowns as well, but this sample is again heavily biased to the Northeast. Overall, my sample of alumni was much better than the seniors. As I sent my survey to two different alumni classes, I was hoping to for about 200 responses to get about double what I would have ideally received from the seniors. I got 180 responses for the alumni survey, which was slightly under 200, but a much better sample size than the seniors.

Table 2.5. Survey Respondents by Gender

Gender	
Female	60.2%
Male	39.8%

Note: n = 180

Table 2.6. Survey Respondents by Major

Major	
Humanities	8.9%
ID/Double Major	21.1%
SET	26.1%
Social Sciences	43.9%

Note: n = 180

Table 2.7. Survey Respondents' Parents' Highest Level of Education

Highest Level of Education	Parent 1	Parent 2
High School	10.5	17.1
Associate's Degree	5.5	6.6
Bachelor's Degree	37.0	33.1
Master's Degree	32.8	29.8
Doctorate	12.7	11.0
Other	1.7	1.1

Note: n = 180

Table 2.8. Survey Respondents' Geographic Region of Origin

Geographic Region	
Northeast	87%
Southeast	3%
West	2%
Midwest	2%
Southwest	2%
Non-U.S.	5%

Note: n = 180

2.3 Demographic Distributions of Interview Participants

I aimed to interview about six respondents from each respective class with various backgrounds and experiences. For the Class of 2015, I actually conducted seven interviews. This group was well distributed amongst gender, with four females and three males. The students also had very diverse major fields of study- with four in the social sciences and three in the SET fields. The geographic distribution of this group was very uneven, with only one participant from the South and six from the Northeast. Nonetheless, I was satisfied with my sample of interview respondents from the Class of 2015.

For the Class of 2014, I received five respondents, two male and three female. Then, the major fields of study for these five alumni were relatively varied, with two science focuses and three social science majors. For this group of alumni, the geographic distribution of the alumni show a complete bias towards the Northeast, where all five reported they are from.

For the Class of 2010, I again only received five respondents. This sample was somewhat biased towards females, with four females and one male. The respective majors also showed some bias for the social sciences, where only one respondent had a SET major, one had humanities, and the rest were social sciences. Then, four of the respondents are from the Northeast, and even more specifically, the state of New York, and one is from the West.

Finally, in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in my paper when referring to their responses, I assigned them pseudonyms. The demographic information for the interview respondents can be seen below in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9. Interview Respondents’ Pseudonyms & Demographic Information

	Gender	Age	Major	Geographic Origin
Class of 2015				
Kathleen C.	Female	22	Social Sciences	MA
Karl B.	Male	22	Social Sciences	NJ
Teena K.	Female	22	Social Sciences	MA
Shane P.	Male	22	SET	MA
Emily S.	Female	22	Social Sciences	TN
Jimmy L.	Male	21	SET	MA
Gary D.	Male	22	SET	MA

Class of 2014

Shea W.	Female	22	Social Sciences	CT
Kelly P.	Female	23	Social Sciences	MA
Cory B.	Male	23	SET	NY
Derek P.	Male	23	SET	MA
Maryellen A.	Female	23	Social Sciences	NY

Class of 2010

Katie L.	Female	28	Social Sciences	NY
Carrie F.	Female	26	Humanities	CO
Bill B.	Male	26	SET	NY
Maria M.	Female	27	Social Sciences	NY
Lee C.	Female	26	Social Sciences	NY

Chapter 3: Results

After conducting a two-pronged analysis of my three subject groups, I obtained a combination of quantitative outputs and qualitative results. I used the statistical program SPSS to compare the data from my survey based on frequency of responses for each variable. I then supplement the data appearing in the tables with responses from my personal interviews as they relate to each specific topic or variable of interest. Based on the slightly different survey questions asked of Seniors versus those asked of Alumni, my descriptive analysis of the variables are divided between these two groups. Also, because my major comparisons focus on differences between these three unique stages in the life course of emerging adulthood, my evaluation will not only involve Seniors versus Alumni, but also Alumni from the Class of 2010 versus the Alumni from the Class of 2014.

3.1 Loans

One of the first questions I asked in my survey involved undergraduate loans. Namely, I wanted to see how many of these young adults had to take out loans, but also who actually signed on the loans and how they are paying them. I was interested in these measures since paying for college is a huge investment, and the manner in which one handles this aspect of college, particularly whether or not they take the loans personally or whether they rely on their parents, speaks to their level of independence. As such, I was looking to see how many people had to take out the

loans, who signed for the loans, and how they are paying them back, with particular attention to the role of parents in this process.

Seniors

As seen in Table 3.1, a little more than half of the seniors reported taking out loans to pay for Union College. Then, looking at Table 3.2, 20.3% of these seniors reported that these were personal loans, made independently in their name. The rest of those who took out loans, about 30%, relied on partial or total parental support for the loans. Seeing as these seniors have yet to complete their education, their status in terms of repayment reflects that almost all have not begun repayment, as these loans can be deferred until completion of undergraduate school (see Table 3.3). However, upon starting this repayment (see Table 3.4), a majority of the seniors, 25.5%, will be paying back these loans using a combination of parental support and personal income, whereas only 15.3% will be using solely personal income. Based on the combination of these different factors associated with loans, it is clear that although some seniors are taking on loans and paying them back independently, a more common avenue involves a combination of personal and parental support. As such, these seniors do not reflect complete dependence on parents, seeing as they are likely to also contribute and less likely to rely on parents to *completely* handle their loans, but they do not exhibit total independence in this field.

Alumni

The alumni showed slightly different patterns in these factors regarding loans. The Class of 2010 showed a similar breakdown in the existence of loans, about half taking out loans and half not taking loans, but the Class of 2014 showed that a greater majority of these graduates, about 60%, took out loans to pay for Union (see Table 3.1). (This increased the amount of responses from the Class of 2014 concerning the other variables.) Then, looking at who signed for the loans, the Class of 2014 had the most personal loans, 41.7% compared to about 30% of the Class of 2010 (see Table 3.2). Then, these two groups of alumni had the same amount of people who had their loans strictly in their parent's name, at about 15.5%. Compared to the seniors, these two groups had very low counts of people whose loans were in both their name and their parents' names, with 6% for the Class of 2010 and only 2.1% for the Class of 2014, compared to 18.6% of seniors.

The repayment status of these groups (see Table 3.3) accurately reflects their status as post-graduates, as only 3.6% of the Class of 2010 has deferred their loans and only 10.4% of the Class of 2014. Instead these two groups both have a majority of people who have at least begun repaying their loans. However, the Class of 2010 has a greater amount of people who have actually completed their loan repayment with 14%, in comparison to only 4.2% in the Class of 2014 and none of the current seniors.

Finally, the methods for repayment for these alumni (see Table 3.4) reveal that these two classes of graduates are more apt to repay these loans using solely personal income. The Class of 2010 had 27.4% report that they are paying back their loans using just personal income, and for the Class of 2014, 33.3%.

Consequently, these two groups both have low counts of respondents who rely solely on parental support for repaying their loans, with 8.3%, and they also have lower numbers of people who rely on a combination of parental support and personal income, with 13.1% for the Class of 2010 and 17.7% for the Class of 2014. As such, these figures reflect that the alumni were more likely to take out loans and specifically personal loans, and also were more apt to pay for their loans independent of parental support. Thus, it appears loans are one such factor of adult life in which more recent emerging adults, that is, seniors and recent graduates, are more dependent on their parents than previous years.

Table 3.1. Respondents' Loans

	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Did Take Loans to Pay for Union College	55.9%	60.4%	52.4%
No Loans to Pay for Union College	44.1%	39.6%	47.6%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.2. Respondents' Names on Loans

Signer on Loan	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Personal/Independent	20.3%	41.7%	29.8%
Parent/guardian	11.9%	15.6%	15.5%
Both (personal & parent)	18.6%	2.1%	6%
Other	1.7%	1%	0%
N/A	47.5%	40%	48%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.3. Respondents' Loan Status

Loan Status	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Deferred	45.8%	10.4%	3.6%
Currently repaying	5.1%	23%	31%
Finished repayment	0%	4.2%	14.3%
N/A	25.4%	23%	15.5%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.4. Respondents' Source of Loan Payment

Loan Payment	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Personal Income	15.3%	33.3%	27.4%
Parental Support	8.5%	8.3%	8.3%
Personal Income + Parental Support	25.5%	17.7%	13.1%
Assistance from Loan-Reduction Program	6.8%	6.2%	3.6%
N/A	44.1%	39%	48%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

3.2 Finances

Closely related to the aspect of loans, one of the most important variables of interest in my study related to the financial status of the respondents. I wanted to observe how financially independent these young adults are, reflected by their ability to pay for their own expenses and generally support themselves. In particular, I was interested in assessing the relative dependence on parental

support exhibited by members of each group, and how long they foresee this dependence lasting.

Seniors

Looking at financial status in general (Table 3.5), less than 4% of seniors who answered the survey would classify themselves as financially independent or receiving minimal support from parents. Instead, about 96% of these seniors reported receiving at least occasional support from their parents, with about 31% saying they are completely dependent on their parents. The other measures of financials reflect these self-reported statuses. Almost 60% of the seniors rely completely on parental support to pay for their living expenses, which refer to room and board or rent fees, with an additional 17% saying they depend on some parental support to supplement their personal income (see Table 3.6). As seniors, this is not very surprising because undergraduates present a unique living situation much different than other emerging adults (discussed further with the “Residential” analysis). Then, looking to extra expenses (Table 3.7), which refers to expenses such as food, clothing, or car payments, the seniors presented slightly better abilities to pay for these added costs, with only about 15% relying completely on their parents. About 25% reported being able to pay for these costs independently, but the majority, 54.2%, support these expenses using a combination of personal income and parental support.

A recurring response given by seniors in the personal interviews involved a separation between “necessities” and “extras”. For instance, Teena reported that her parents pay for tuition and room & board, but any other costs she accrues at Union

are dependent on her own income or personal savings. Karl conveyed a similar scenario, saying, “my parents pay for my tuition and room & board at Union, but then anything ‘extra’ is on me, like costs for extra activities or continuing my education... They made it clear they will pay for four years, then anything else is all on me”. That is, his parents will pay for the four years of his undergraduate education, something they view as a necessity, but anything more is up to him. As such, he currently supports his extra expenses with personal income, and any additional education he pursues in the future will be supported using solely personal income as well.

Finally, in estimating how long they believe it will take for them to achieve financial independence from their parents (Table 3.8), most seniors believe it will take at least a year. About 38% believe they will achieve this independence in 1-2 years, then about 25% believe it will take 2-4 years and a noteworthy 15.3% believe it could take as much as 5-10 years.

Seeing as hardly any of this class reported being completely financially independent, their personal accounts instead tended to extrapolate as to when they would achieve such independence. For instance, Emily and Shane both expect their financial dependence on their parents to change in the future based on their employment status. Shane has just accepted a paid, full-time position following graduation and although he reports being very much dependent on his parents right now, he foresees this changing shortly after graduation. He explains,

“Right now, I would say I’m very dependent on my parents because they pretty much pay for everything-school, clothes, cellphone... After graduation when I start working full-time, I’ll be able to support myself financially. In the immediate

future, I might have to borrow money for an apartment because I don't have enough for right now, but I think I'll be able to pay for stuff on my own by August."

Emily is currently in search of a job, but she also believes her financial dependence on her parents will change in the relatively near future. She reported,

"I'm still dependent on my parents for financial support, and I pretty much will be until I'm employed. I think once I get a job, I'll start making money and I will still probably have to save a little for a few months before I can do it totally on my own, but I think the time all depends on my job".

Thus, seniors as a whole reported being generally dependent on their parents for some degree of financial support, and most believe it will probably take somewhere between 1-4 years to completely become financially independent. As such, these seniors have barely "cut the cord" and don't foresee that changing in the near future, but instead expect some extended period of time to pass before they can completely support themselves financially.

Alumni

The alumni groups presented very different responses about their financial status (see Table 3.5). The Class of 2010 appears to be the most independent class, with 46.4% identifying themselves as completely independent and another 27% reporting that they receive very little financial support from their parents. Then, less than 5% of this class reported being completely dependent on parental support. The Class of 2014 also had a very low amount of fully dependent respondents with 6.3%, but they also had considerably fewer people report being fully independent, with 18.8% as compared to the 46.4% in the Class of 2010. In general, the Class of 2014

has less people in the “extreme” categories of total or no independence, and instead exhibits a more even distribution across the categories of parental support. The majority of this class does not require total financial support, but does rely on some degree of assistance from their parents, whether it be infrequent, occasional, or very frequent. Thus, it appears the Class of 2014 relies on their parents less than seniors, but still requires more assistance than the Class of 2010.

Respondents from the Class of 2010 also had very interesting accounts of their financial stability in the five years that have passed since their graduation. For instance, Carrie reported that she had experienced a tough time finding employment immediately after school, and as such, she returned home and relied on her parents financially. Then, she decided to move to the city, and the last bit of help her parents had given her was allowing her to use their car “however she pleased”. She then sold the car, and that was the last form of financial assistance she has received from her parents. Katie presented a similar account, where she was dependent on her parents for a year following graduation, but since becoming a full-time employee, she has become financially independent and has not since required help from her parents.

Maria, however, presented a different story. She had been engaged right before graduation, and immediately after, her and her fiancé were totally on their own, covering their own expenses during their post-graduate careers with no help at all from their parents. However, after these past few years of complete independence, they returned to live with her parents while they decide what their next “step” will be and are no longer totally independent financially.

Then, Bill said he would classify himself as financially independent based on his ability to pay for all his major expenses. His parents do still pay for his cellphone, but he considered himself independent of them overall based on his ability to pay for his large-scale living expenses, such as rent, food, clothing, and other expenses besides his phone.

These members of the Class of 2010 exhibit how financial independence can be a variable status in the life course of emerging adults. Some people can become independent immediately and never have to receive more help from their parents ever again, others might be on their own yet require continued assistance down the line, and some require a little aid before completely getting on their own two feet.

Conversely, the Class of 2014 had more cases in which their parents are still in the process of helping them “get on their own two feet”. For instance, Shea reported that she has been working part-time after graduation and is also a grad student in a masters program. As she is paying her own tuition for grad school, her parents are currently covering her other expenses.

Conversely, Derek, who has yet to begin his graduate school program and is still preparing to take entrance exams, explained that his parents are willing to pay for “anything educational”, such as an additional prerequisite course he needs for his program. However, since they support his academic endeavors, he pays for all of his extra expenses with personal income.

As such, these members of the Class of 2014 exemplify how parents of emerging adults are willing to provide certain amounts of financial support to their children so they are able to pursue additional opportunities, such as higher

education, as they do not yet have the means to support themselves fully. That is, parents are willing to contribute financially as these graduates make progress towards their future as independents, but still require them to pay for some expenses.

Looking at the living expenses (Table 3.6), at 66.7%, the Class of 2010 displays the greatest ability to pay for living expenses using solely personal income. They also report the lowest count of financial support from just parents to support living expenses at less than 3%. Then, about 12% reported using a combination of personal income and parental support. Conversely, the Class of 2014 does not display such stark independence, with only about 28% supporting their living expenses with personal income. Instead, the most common circumstance for the Class of 2014 involved a combination of personal income and parental support. Trends in residential status of this group (discussed in the next section) seem to provide an explanation for this trend; namely, most recent graduates reported having higher instances of living at home and as such, this would categorize them as receiving parental support to pay for living expenses.

In a similar fashion to these living expenses, the Class of 2010 reported the most independence in paying for extra expenses (see Table 3.7), with 77.4% using solely personal income and less than 4% relying on parents. The Class of 2014 was fairly close with about 56% using just personal income, but they reported higher counts of people using a combination of personal income and parental support. Also, the Class of 2010 was the only group who reported spousal support for their extra expenses, although very minimal. These findings point to a two-pronged

explanation- first, that having a spouse is not a factor for the seniors or most recent alumni, and second, even for the older alumni, having a spouse was very uncommon.

Finally, when asked how many years they would expect to need before achieving financial independence (see Table 3.8), a majority of the Class of 2010, about 46%, reported “none”, based on the fact that they are already independent. Then, about a third of them reported it would take 2 years or less. Conversely, the Class of 2014 had much less people, 18.8%, who reported already being financially independent, thus requiring no amount of time. The most common response for the Class of 2014 was “2-4 years”, with 32.3%, followed by “less than a year”, with about 23%.

Thus, it appears that the Class of 2010 has been most successful in becoming less financially dependent on their parents, and the Class of 2014 is still working towards this end, but foresees a shift in their levels of parental dependence within the next 4 years. As such, these results suggest that financial independence, like other markers of adulthood, has become a status more likely to occur later on in the life course than it once appeared, in one’s mid-to-late twenties.

Table 3.5. Respondents' Overall Financial Status

(General) Financial Status	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
"I am completely dependent on my parents/guardians for financial support"	30.5%	6.3%	4.8%
"I rely on my parents/guardians for frequent, but not total, financial support"	42.4%	21.9%	6%
"I rely on my parents/guardians for occasional, but not total, financial support"	23.7%	28.1%	15.5%
"I receive very little financial support from my parents/guardians"	1.7%	21.9%	27.4%
"I am completely independent/support myself"	1.7%	18.8%	46.4%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.6. Respondents' Financial Payments for Living Expenses

Living Expenses (rent, room & board, etc.)	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Personal Income	6.8%	28.1%	66.7%
Parent/guardian Support	59.3%	17.7%	2.4%
Government Aid/Stipends	10.1%	7.3%	10.7%
Personal Income + Parental Support	17%	31.3%	11.9%
Personal Income + Spousal Support	0%	2.1%	6%
Other	6.8%	13.6%	2.3%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.7. Respondents' Financial Payments for Additional Expenses

Extra Living Expenses (food, clothing, car, insurance, phone etc.)	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Personal Income	25.4%	56.3%	77.4%
Parent/guardian Support	15.3%	7.3%	3.6%
Government Aid/Stipends	1.7%	11.5%	8.3%
Personal Income + Parental Support	54.2%	19.8%	6%
Personal Income + Spousal Support	0%	0%	1.2%
Other	3.4%	5.1%	3.5%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.8. Respondents' Expected Time to Achieve Financial Independence

Expected Years to Financial Independence	Class of 2015	Class of 2010	Class of 2014
0 years (already Financially Independent)	1.7%	46.4%	18.8%
< 1 year	16.9%	13.1%	22.9%
1-2 years	37.3%	21.4%	15.6%
2-4 years	25.4%	14.3%	32.3%
5-10 years	15.3%	4.8%	10.4%
Unsure	3.4%	1.2%	0%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

3.3 Residential

For this variable, I was interested in determining the living arrangements of participants to observe levels of residential dependence or independence. I separated the analysis of this variable by graduation year, namely because current seniors have a unique situation based on their status at a residential college, whereas alumni are no longer in this undergraduate circumstance. As such, I phrased the questions regarding living situations separately in the two surveys and

presented these differing responses accordingly. I was mostly interested in observing how many people are still living with their parents, as this trend is seen as one of the major shifts between generations that have come to characterize emerging adulthood. (These measures focused strictly on the actual place of residence for respondents, whereas the reliance on others for payment of living expenses was discussed earlier in the “Finances” section.)

Seniors

As to be expected, an overwhelming majority of seniors, 96.6%, live with their parents while classes are not in session at Union College (see Table 3.9). A small minority, less than 4%, also live with their parents during school, while a significant amount lives with roommates at school, on or off-campus. None of these figures are too surprising, as they reflect the usual residential status of an undergraduate student- living away from home during the term and then returning home over break. This circumstance reveals how many emerging adults in college do not directly rely on parents for housing during school (see Table 3.10), but their permanent residence or “home” remains with their parents. As such, their perceived residential independence is not as well defined as the other groups, and further indicates the unique characteristics of today’s emerging adulthood.

Although this did not appear in my survey, the topic of planned living arrangements did surface in the interviews during discussions of post-graduate plans. As such, most of the seniors did explain their current plans for housing after graduation. Four of the respondents- Kathleen, Karl, Teena, and Gary- reported that they would be moving home upon graduation to save up money and hopefully

relocate once they acquire greater financial stability. Notably, these four all have secured positions following graduation, meaning they are returning home with a definitive plan, not based on inability to secure their options. As such, these four seem to embody the concept of “forward motion” where emerging adults return home and receive this support from parents in order to allow them to focus on other tasks, such as school or their career.

As for the rest, Emily and Shane reported that they would be moving out after graduation to live with roommates. Then, Jimmy has an immediate plan to live at camp over the summer, but come fall, he is unsure of where he will be living. Overall, these planned living scenarios for the seniors reflect the growing trend in returning home following graduation, as well as the other fairly common avenue of moving away from “the nest” yet not living alone, instead with roommates.

Table 3.9. Respondents’ Residential Status for Non-Academic Terms

Residential Status (out of school/on break)	Class of 2015
Living with parents	96.6%
Living with significant other	1.7%
Living with roommates (non-relative)	1.7%
	n = 61

Table 3.10. Respondents' Residential Status for Academic Terms

Residential Status (in school)	Class of 2015
Living on-campus	47.5%
Living off-campus	28.8%
N/A	23.7%
Living with roommates	66.1%
Living alone	18.7%
Living with parents	3.4%
Living with significant other	5.1%
	n = 61

Alumni

Looking to the residential status of alumni (Table 3.11), the Class of 2014 reflects less reliance on parents for residential support than the seniors, but still about 37% of this class lives with their parents. As the group of emerging adults that has most recently graduated, it is noteworthy that this sizeable amount has returned home and remain living with their parents almost a year after graduation. Conversely, less than 5% of the Class of 2010 lives with their parents, revealing that hardly any of these graduates have currently resorted back to living with their parents. Thus, these two groups of alumni accurately reflect the shifting patterns of residential status for emerging adults, namely that it has become more common for people to move home immediately following graduation and eventually move out, but still potentially live at home several years later.

However, another noteworthy finding apparent here is that, although more of the Class of 2014 has returned home, more members of this group are living

alone than the Class of 2010. Also, a great deal of the Class of 2010 lives with roommates or a significant other. As such, these results appear to show that, although older alumni are less likely to live independent of their parents, this does not necessarily entail that they live completely on their own.

For instance, Katie lived at home for a year after graduation in 2010, then she moved out and has since not returned to live with her parents, yet she lives in an apartment with a roommate she knows from college. Carrie and Lee both recanted similar stories of moving home immediately following graduation, but now living in an apartment with multiple roommates. Then, the other two respondents from the Class of 2010 reported that they actually live with their significant others. As such, although none of these participants are residentially dependent on their parents, they do not necessarily live alone, but instead exhibit some of the varied living arrangements that separate emerging adulthood from full-fledged adulthood; mainly, the act of “settling down” into a more permanent housing scenario versus the act of sharing temporary living arrangements with non-family members.

Table 3.11. Respondents’ Residential Status

Residential Status	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Living alone	22.9%	15.5%
Living with roommates	28.1%	41.7%
Living with parents	36.5%	4.8%
Living with significant other	11.5%	38.1%
Other	1%	0%
	n = 96	n = 84

3.4 Post-graduation Plans

This analysis only applied to seniors because I was interested in observing their post-graduation plans and where they are in the process of solidifying their plans, whereas the Alumni groups have already graduated and spent at least a year out of school. I ultimately inquired as to their current plans following graduation, where they are in the process of solidifying these positions, and how these plans relate to their overall career objectives. I was also interested to see where they are planning to live following graduation, and ultimately, observe how these plans compare to the current employment and residential trends of the other two groups. These responses were generated in April of 2015, and as such, some of the responses in terms of deciding or securing plans or positions are reflective of this time in the academic year of these seniors.

Seniors

As seen in Table 3.12, a majority of the seniors, 49.2%, are planning on working full-time upon graduation. Then, about 24% will be pursuing grad school, about 10% will be both working and pursuing a graduate degree, and about 9% will be participating in a fellowship or service-based program. These plans, similar to the current statuses of alumni, again reflect growing trends in both higher education, as well as non-academic opportunities. Only about 5% of the seniors are still deciding or unsure, which shows that this group of young adults as a whole has been very proactive in preparing post-collegiate opportunities.

However, one of the other measures I used to gauge the current status of seniors involved where they are in actually securing positions or definitively enrolling in certain opportunities, as opposed to still applying or deciding. As seen in Table 3.13, about half of the seniors have actually secured a position or officially enrolled, whereas about a third are still looking for a position. Then, about 13% are in the process of interviewing for a specific position, and about 5% are still unsure. As such, almost all of the seniors have some plan for what they hope to do following graduation, but only about half have actually solidified these plans.

I also asked how these current post-graduate plans related to the overall career objectives of these seniors to better understand their motivations for pursuing their respective paths (see Table 3.14). Ultimately, about 18% of seniors are pursuing a plan that would start their overall desired career. That is, the position or opportunity they are planning to take following graduation is directly related to their overall career objective and acts as the first step on the trajectory to that goal. However, a majority of the seniors reported that their current plan is related to their overall goal, but not directly placing them on that track. For instance, about 29% reported that their plans are meant to provide experience for their desired career, but not officially begin it. Similarly, another 29% reported that their plans will be providing them with formal education or training, such as a graduate degree or residency program, that are related to their overall position, but not directly beginning it. Then, about 12% reported their post-graduation plans were actually meant to help them *discover* their overall career objectives, and as such, could or could not be a direct beginning of their career. Finally, almost 9% reported

they were unsure of the relation of their plans to their overall goals. As such, the purposes and relationships of these plans to the overall career objectives of these seniors reveal that not only are emerging adults changing their careers more frequently than previous generations, they are also postponing the start of these careers, and even the planning or genesis of their career objectives, more so than in years passed.

Similarly, I also asked about the perceived length of these post-graduation plans (see Table 3.15). That is, I was interested to know whether or not they were meant to be temporary, permanent, or last for an indeterminate amount of time, in order to gauge whether or not these seniors anticipated many changes or variations to their post-collegiate experiences. The most common response, with 35.6%, indicated that the positions they were planning to begin following graduation were in fact temporary with a definite endpoint. This could include graduate school or other educational programs with a designated length, or an offer of employment marked as strictly temporary. Then, the next most common answer revealed that about 27% of seniors were entering a position they deemed to be permanent. The rest of the responses revealed that the length of these post-graduate plans were ultimately indeterminate, with about 19% saying they were “temporary with no definite endpoint”, about 9% saying they “could be temporary or permanent”, and about 10% were unsure. Overall, these results show that current seniors are planning to enter positions that they don’t believe will be permanent and instead, imply that they foresee a change in employment or position in the future. Ultimately, these responses further convey that it is becoming more common to have more than

one position in one's work experience and somewhat expected to have a position following graduation that will change.

Finally, I asked these seniors where they were planning to live immediately following graduation (see Table 3.16). A majority, about 54%, said they plan to move away from home and not return to their parents' home. However, a sizable amount, about 29% reported that they would be returning home to live with their parents, and then about 17% were still unsure of their intended place of residence following graduation. Along with the noteworthy frequency of returning home, within the category of moving away, only 3.4% reported they would be living completely alone. Instead, a majority of these respondents indicated would most likely live with roommates or a significant other. Thus, the current plans for seniors convey the growing acceptance in returning home to live with parents immediately following college, and also, an overall decline in residential independence of emerging adults.

The responses in the personal interviews generated responses very similar to those of the survey. For instance, Kathleen has accepted a service-based fellowship position upon graduation. This is designated as a temporary position, but Kathleen likes this because she reported having many varied interests with no strong inclination or solidified plan at this time relating to a career. As such, she is grateful that her time in this position will give her experience, but also the opportunity to figure out what field she would like to pursue. Then, Gary and Shane also reported having secured full-time positions to begin following graduation, but in the specific field of engineering, which happened to be both of their major fields

of study at Union College. Further, Shane described his job as being temporary to long-term, saying, “This position isn’t meant to last forever and I’ll stick with it for however long I think it should lasts, but I will probably want to do something different in the next five or so years”. As such, these three with secured full-time positions illustrate that for emerging adults, employment immediately following graduation is not always meant to be permanent, but instead can be beneficial to gain experience in a particular field, or even to discover which field they want to pursue.

Besides these employment trends, these respondents also exhibited the increased rates of higher education. For instance, Teena has been accepted into a yearlong grad school program that she will begin in the fall. She described how, although her plan has changed slightly over the years, she always knew she wanted to work with kids, and has decided to go into teaching, a field in which she will need her Masters Degree. Karl will also be heading to grad school, but he is taking a gap year to work and save money before going for a three-year doctorate degree.

Table 3.12. Respondents’ Post-Graduation Plan

Post-Graduation Plan	Class of 2015
Graduate School	23.7%
Full-time Employment	49.2%
Work + Graduate School	10.2%
Fellowship/Service-Based Program	8.5%
Internship/Unpaid Position	1.7%
Still deciding/unsure	5.1%
Other	1.7%
	n = 61

Table 3.13. Current Status of Respondents' Post-Graduation Plan

Current Status of Post-Graduation Plan	Class of 2015
Secured position/enrolled	47.5%
Interviewing for position/opportunity	13.6%
Searching for positions/opportunities	33.9%
Still deciding/unsure	5.1%
	n = 61

Table 3.14. Relation of Respondents' Post-Graduation Plan to Desired Career or Overall Career Objectives

Relation of Post-Graduation Plans to Overall Career Objectives	Class of 2015
Directly Starting Desired Career	18.6%
Helping to Discover Desired Career	11.9%
Providing Experience for Desired Career	28.9%
Providing Formal Training/Education Necessary for Desired Career	28.8%
Not Related to Desired Career	3.4%
Still Deciding/Unsure	8.5%
	n = 61

Table 3.15. Perceived Length of Respondents' Post-Graduation Plan

Perceived Length for Post-Graduation Plans	Class of 2015
Permanent	27.1%
Temporary, with definite endpoint	35.6%
Temporary, without definite endpoint	18.6%
Temporary or Permanent	8.5%
Still Deciding/Unsure	10.2%
	n = 61

Table 3.16. Respondents' Post-Graduation Residential Plan

Post-Graduation Residential Plans	Class of 2015
Move Away from Home/Not Live with Parents	54.3%
Live Alone	3.4%
Live with Roommates	28.8%
Live with Significant Other	10.2%
Return Home/Live with Parents	28.8%
Still Deciding/Unsure	16.9%
	n = 61

3.5 Employment

Next, I wanted to observe the employment status of respondents in these three groups. For Alumni, I was interested to view their post-graduate employment, particularly to see if they were continuing their education, if they had achieved success in finding a position, or if they still found themselves looking for opportunities. For Seniors, because they are still in school full-time, their current employment status was very limited, and instead, I was more interested in assessing their current status in searching for or solidifying positions. As such, their intended or potential positions instead appear in the separate section relating to their post-graduate plans, and I focused here on the current employment status of alumni. Because respondents could hold more than one position at once, there were many cases where one person fulfilled multiple roles. As such, I simply marked the frequency of responses for each category, and later commented on some combinations of these variables that appeared most frequently.

Alumni

Overall, the alumni have been fairly successful in achieving full-time employment status, with 76.2% of the Class of 2010 and 55.2% of the Class of 2014 reporting their status as a full-time employee (see Table 3.17). Then, a fair amount from each group, 22.6% and 30.2%, are currently enrolled in a graduate school program, reflecting the overall widespread increase in continued education for today's generation of emerging adults. From the interview respondents alone, four out of five from the Class of 2014 are either currently enrolled or plan to pursue a degree in higher education, and three out of five from the Class of 2010 have completed a degree in higher education or are currently pursuing one. Reflective of these survey responses were the employment descriptions of interview respondents. Namely, three of the respondents from the Class of 2010 are currently full-time employees, and the other two were full-time employees for the past few years but have recently pursued other options; with one currently in grad school and the other in-between jobs. As such, these respondents reflected the high rates of employment for these alumni. Then, the Class of 2014 reported having higher rates of pursuing higher education, with three currently enrolled in a full-time graduate school program and one in the process of applying for graduate school.

Only about 1% from each class reported having no current position, revealing that most of the alumni have been proactive about employment and very few are doing nothing. The Class of 2014 showed more variation in their employment type than the Class of 2010 as they exhibited more temporary positions, and also internships and fellowships. This variation makes intuitive sense

based on their immediate post-graduation status, whereas the Class of 2010 has been out of school for a few years and has therefore had more time to secure positions. Also, the activity of the Class of 2014 reveals the increased presence of more experiential opportunities, such as internships and fellowships, following graduation, whereas the Class of 2010 revealed no members who were enrolled in such positions. As such, this reflects a trend of gaining additional experiences upon graduation that don't necessarily entail full-time employment, a trend that could aid further instability in financial, residential, and employment status and thus, further delay the transition to full-fledged "adulthood".

Looking at the employment searches (Table 3.18), less than 3% of the Class of 2010 is currently searching for a position, whereas about 8% of the Class of 2014 is currently searching. Another interesting figure appears in the multiple roles section (Table 3.19), where it can be seen that all of the people in the Class of 2010 who are searching for a position are actually already employed, yet seeking new employment, whereas the number is slightly less for the Class of 2014.

Additionally, all of the interview respondents from the Class of 2010 reported that they are either actively searching for new employment, or will be in the next year or so. Katie, who is currently a full-time project manager at a medical association, described, "This is not my dream job by any means... I guess I will continue this position for the next 6 months to a year, but then I will be looking for a new job". Similarly, Bill is a full-time business analyst for a sales firm, and he has been contemplating several different options for the future, including going back to business school to further extend his possibilities in this field, or even looking for a

job in a vastly different field. These findings are noteworthy based on their reflection of employment trends for emerging adults; namely, the growing trend of having multiple positions and many potential paths of employment.

Table 3.17. Respondents' Reported Occupational Roles

Occupation	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Graduate Student	30.2%	22.6%
Employed Full-time	55.2%	76.2%
Employed Part-time	9.4%	2.4%
Employed Temporarily	8.3%	1.2%
Fellow/Participant in Service-based Program	10.4%	0%
Unpaid Internship	7.3%	0%
Paid Internship	2.1%	1.2%
No Reported Position	1%	1.2%
	n=96	n=84

Table 3.18. Respondents' Status in Searching for Employment

Employment Search Status	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Searching for Employment	8.3%	2.4%
Not Searching for Employment	91.7%	97.5%
	n=96	n=84

Table 3.19. Common Combinations of Respondents' Occupational Roles

	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Full-time Employee + Graduate School	9.4%	2.4%
Graduate School + Part-time Employee	4.2%	1.2%
Employee + Searching for Employment	6.3%	2.4%
	n=96	n=84

3.6 Parental Involvement

After assessing levels of independence for these various measures, I then looked to overall parental involvement in the lives of these emerging adults. As a major focus of my research, I was interested in uncovering the extent to which emerging adults discuss aspects of their “adult” lives- such as their career, finances, and long-term goals- with their parents, but also the degree to which parental involvement has shaped or perhaps altered these aspects. In addition, I also asked seniors about the role of their parents in their academic lives, as current undergraduates who (at the time of the survey) were potentially still making important decisions in their academics that could affect their post-collegiate careers.

Seniors

In general, about half of the seniors, 50.8%, reported that their parents were at least “somewhat involved” in their lives overall (see Table 3.20). Then, almost 30% reported that they were “very involved”, and about 20% reported they were “barely involved”. Looking to more specific measures, I asked about the frequency and topics of conversations with parents (see 3.21). Ultimately, the seniors reported that they communicate or speak with their parents very frequently. Almost 30% speak with their parents at least once a day- with 3.4% speaking 4-6 times per day, 10.2% speaking 2-3 times per day, and then 13.6% speaking exactly once per day. Then, for those who don’t speak with their parents everyday, over 60% still speak with them at least once a week- with 16.9% speaking exactly once a week, 25.4%

speaking 2-3 times per week, and 18.6% speaking 4-6 times per week. Then, the remaining 11% still speak to their parents at least once a month. Thus, it is evident that seniors still keep frequent contact with their parents.

After uncovering the frequency of the conversations that seniors have with their parents, I was then interested to know the extent of their conversations regarding academics and aspects of their future. As can be seen in Table 3.27, almost 95% of seniors reported they commonly discussed academic affairs, such as choice of classes or major, with their parents, with only 5% reporting they never discussed these academic affairs with their parents. Then, when asked how often their parents would offer advice or suggest changes to their academic affairs (see Table 3.28), almost 80% said their parents would suggest at least minimal changes to their academics- with about 7% saying they “suggest frequent changes”, about 36% saying they “sometimes suggest changes”, and 36% saying they “suggest rare or minimal changes”.

When asked how often their parents physically *make* changes to their academics, about 71% said their parents would never actually make changes to their academics (see Table 3.29). However, that still left almost 30% who had parents who would make at least some of their own changes to the academic affairs of their children, revealing a noteworthy level of not just parental involvement, but parental *interference*, in the lives of seniors. Finally, when asked about how supportive their parents were in aspects involving their education, the seniors reported having no parents who “opposed” their academic decisions. Instead, almost 80% said their parents are very supportive of their choices in education. Of

the remaining 20%, about 13% reported their parents were still somewhat supportive, and then about 7% reported their parents were neutral or had no opinion regarding their education (see Table 3.30).

Apart from education, other important topics of conversation and parental involvement for the seniors included their future plans and career goals. Similar to discussions about education, about 95% of seniors discuss their career and employment prospects with their parents, and of these, 61% reported these discussions happen very frequently. Only 5% reported never discussing their career with their parents (see Table 3.22). Then, when asked how often their parents suggest changes to their current or future career goals, a majority of seniors reported that their parents do suggest changes (see Table 3.23). Although only about 9% said their parents make frequent suggestions, there were still 22% who said their parents sometimes make suggestions and 39% say they make infrequent or very rare suggestions. Then, about 31% said their parents never make suggestions to change their current or future career goals. Finally, when asked about how often their parents would actually *make* changes to their career goals, most of the seniors, about 73%, reported their parents would never actually make their own changes. However, that does mean that over a quarter of the respondents have parents who would actually alter the career goals and objectives of their children (see Table 3.24).

Comparing these responses to their responses regarding frequency of conversations, it ultimately appears that seniors almost always discuss their career goals with their parents to some degree, but parents are slightly less likely to make

or suggest changes to their career goals. However, the degree to which parents do suggest or actually make such changes still indicates a relatively strong degree of parental involvement in the goal orientation of this group of emerging adults about to graduate from college.

I also included a question regarding the frequency of conversations with parents regarding finances to assess how often seniors would discuss financial matters with their parents, revealing how important this aspect of “adult life” is to seniors and their parents. Ultimately, seniors reported that finances did often come up in discussion- with about 24% saying they discussed financial matters with their parents very often, about 64% saying they discuss this occasionally, and only 11% saying they never discussed finances with their parents (see Table 3.26). As such, financial matters appear to be a relatively important topic of conversation between seniors about to graduate college and their parents.

When asked to generally describe their relationship with their parents, the seniors all provided very interesting and varied accounts. For instance, Kathleen identified that her and her parents had a good relationship, but they are “very independent from each other”. That is, they talk every week or so, but Kathleen doesn’t talk to them about major events or opportunities in her life until she is 100% sure of what she wants, and they also hardly ever discuss finances. As such, her parents do not exhibit great control over her decisions, seeing as she makes them independently and notifies her parents afterwards, instead of consulting them in the decision-making process.

Conversely, Karl said he is very close to his parents, speaking with them at least twice a week and almost always discussing classes, finances, and future plans. Although he said his parents are always very willing to allow him to explore his interests, they did exhibit some skepticism about his plans to pursue a graduate degree. As such, they had lengthy discussions about the pros and cons of this plan and made him increasingly aware of the effects of this decision, and he accredited some of his decision to take a gap-year to his parents. Although they played an advisory role, Karl stated that they ultimately defer to him when making the final decision. Gary had a very similar account, stating that his parents were helpful in offering advice and offering their inputs, but they ultimately leave all final decisions up to him.

Then, three of the respondents- Jimmy, Emily, and Shane- said that their conversations with their parents are somewhat limited based on relative experiences. That is, their parents are not very knowledgeable about their respective academic fields or desired careers. As such, they do not discuss their academic affairs, career goals, or future plans as regularly because they don't believe their parents will fully understand, and therefore, they don't believe discussing with their parents will be beneficial in terms of advice or other input.

Alumni

Looking to alumni, both of these classes reported less general involvement from parents than the seniors (see Table 3.20). The Class of 2014 has about 24% of respondents say that their parents were "barely or not involved" in their everyday

lives, and the remaining respondents were about evenly split between parents being “somewhat involved” versus “very involved”. Then, the Class of 2010 reported that about 40% had parents who were barely or not involved, the highest of the three groups. Then, of the remaining respondents who reported their parents were involved, only 14% had parents who were very involved, and instead the majority at 46% said their parents were only somewhat involved. Thus, the levels of general parental involvement of the three groups decreased consecutively with respect to the order of graduation, with the Class of 2015 reporting the greatest and the Class of 2010 reporting the least levels of general parental involvement. These figures indicate that, in general, parental involvement appears to decrease sequentially following graduation from college.

Then, looking to the frequency of conversations with parents (see Table 3.21), it appears that these figures also decrease from the seniors to the Class of 2010. However, the Class of 2014 actually speaks to their parents more frequently than the seniors and Class of 2010. Over 50% of the Class of 2014 reported speaking to their parents at least once a day- with 14.6% speaking to their parents exactly once a day, 19.8% speaking with them 2-3 times per day, and then 18.8% speaking with them 4-6 times per day. These numbers are vastly different than the trends seen in the seniors, as well as with the Class of 2010 who only had about 26% of respondents speak with their parents at least once a day. (However, I believe these figures reflect the residential status of the Class of 2014, namely that a large portion of this class has returned to live with their parents and as such, are much more likely to see them and speak with them. As such, the measures of the topics of

conversation will be more indicative of the relationship between this group and their parents.)

When asked how frequently they speak with their parents about their careers and employment perspectives (see Table 3.22), the alumni presented similar figures to the seniors in that hardly any, 7.1% for the Class of 2010 and 6.3% for the Class of 2014, never speak to their parents about their current or future career-oriented goals. However, the major difference lies in how often, seeing as how 49% of the Class of 2014 and then 32% of the Class of 2010 reported speaking to their parents “very often” about their career, which leaves 45% and 61%, respectively, speaking with their parents “occasionally”. Thus, it can be seen that the frequency of these career-oriented discussions appears to decrease consecutively across the classes.

Then, looking to the amount of advice that parents offer to alumni regarding their career, we again see that the frequency appears to go down by class year (see Table 3.23). The Class of 2010 displayed the highest amount of parents who “never suggest changes to career” with 40%, whereas the Class of 2014 had about 28%. Compared to the Class of 2015, the seniors and the Class of 2014 are about the same, whereas the Class of 2010 has a higher amount of parents who don’t suggest changes to career or employment factors. As such, it appears that seniors and recent grads discuss their careers with their parents more, and their parents also offer more advice and suggestions in such discussions than the parents of the Class of 2010.

However, when asked about the extent to which parents actually *make* changes regarding their career or employment, the results were slightly different (see Table 3.24). The Class of 2010 reported the least amount of direct parental interference in their career- with no parents (0%) that “make frequent changes”, 77% that “make no changes”, and the rest were almost all “minimal or rare changes”. However, the Class of 2014 had 2.1% that “make frequent changes”, 66% that “make no changes”, and the rest were mostly minimal changes, but there were about 10% who make “some/occasional changes”. These figures are interesting because the Class of 2014 shows higher levels of parental interference regarding careers and employment than the seniors, and then these levels drop down again for the Class of 2010.

Then, looking at the levels of parental support for the current employment and future career goals of these alumni, we see almost identical figures for the Class of 2010 and 2014 (see Table 3.25). They both reported a little over 80% of parents were “very supportive” of their current career prospects. Then, for the Class of 2010, the remainder of the responses were evenly split between having parents that were “somewhat supportive” and “neutral or have no opinion”, and as such, none of the parents for the Class of 2010 are at all opposed to their current career prospects. The rest of results for the Class of 2014 show again an even split between “somewhat supportive” and “neutral”, but there were a few respondents whose parents were opposed to their choices and plans regarding their career.

Finally, when asked how often the topic of finances came up in conversations with their parents (see Table 3.26), the Class of 2014 reported the highest levels of

discussion involving financial status. Only 5.2% of the Class of 2014 said they never discuss their finances with their parents, whereas the Class of 2010 had 14.3%. Then, about 41% of the Class of 2014 discusses their financial status with their parents “very often”, instead of 22.6% of the Class of 2010. Thus, compared to both seniors and the Class of 2010, the Class of 2014 is almost twice as likely to discuss finances with their parents.

When asked about their overall relationship and tendencies of conversations with parents, the alumni I interviewed presented mixed results. For instance, some of the alumni in the Class of 2010- such as Katie, Carrie, and Lee- reported that they speak to their parents fairly often, but the nature of their conversations is mostly informative. That is, they provide their parents with updates about their life, such as employment prospects and future goals, but their parents do not have an input or say in their decisions; rather, they update them after a decision has been made. Then, the other members of this class, Bill and Maria, reported that they do occasionally consult their parents for advice when making certain decisions. However, Maria noted that this advisory role of her parents is partly due to the fact that they are both involved in the same field she intends to pursue, and ultimately, she makes her major decisions with her husband.

Looking to the Class of 2014, the extent of the relationships between these alumni and their parents were slightly different. For instance, alumni like Shea and Derek, who have returned home after graduation, speak with their parents at least once a day, and their conversations usually do involve their employment prospects and future plans. They explained that they provide their parents with updates about

their future academic endeavors in grad school, as well as short and long-term goals, but their parents do not play an active role in the decision-making process. Then, other members of this class like Kelly and Maryellen, who are both currently in grad school and living away from home, speak with their parents less frequently, and they mostly provide updates about current happenings in their life at school. Ultimately, these two described how their parents mostly just want to know that they are doing well and achieving the goals they have set out for themselves, and as such, the nature of these conversations are mostly just informative.

Table 3.20. Respondents' Levels of Parental Involvement

General Involvement	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Involved	28.8%	36.5%	14.3%
Somewhat Involved	50.8%	39.6%	46.4%
Barely/Not Involved	20.3%	23.9%	39.3%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.21. Frequency of Respondents' Conversations with Parents

Frequency of Conversations with Parents (General)	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
4-6 times per day	3.4%	18.8%	2.4%
2-3 times per day	10.2%	19.8%	13.1%
Once per day	13.6%	14.6%	10.7%
4-6 times per week	18.6%	14.3%	17.9%
2-3 times per week	25.4%	19.8%	19%
Once per week	16.9%	11.5%	17.9%
2-3 times per month	6.8%	3.1%	13.1%
Once per month	5.1%	0%	3.6%
3-6 times per year	0%	0%	1.2%
Never	0%	0%	1.2%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.22. Frequency of Respondents' Conversations with Parents Regarding Career

Frequency of Conversations with Parents Regarding Career	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Often	61%	48.9%	32.1%
Occasionally/Sometimes	33.9%	44.8%	60.7%
Never	5.1%	6.3%	7.1%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.23. Frequency of Respondents' Parents' Advice Regarding Career

Frequency of Parental Advice Regarding Career	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Frequently suggest changes to career	8.5%	3.1%	1.2%
Sometimes suggest changes to career	22%	25%	27.4%

Rarely suggest changes to career	39%	43.8%	32.1%
Never suggest changes to career	30.5%	28.1%	39.3%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.24. Frequency of Respondents' Parents' Changes to Career

Frequency of Parental Changes to Career	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Make frequent changes to career	1.7%	2.1%	0%
Make some/occasional changes to career	8.5%	9.4%	4.8%
Make rare/minimal changes to career	16.9%	22.9%	17.9%
Do not make any changes to career	72.9%	65.6%	77.4%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.25. Level of Respondents' Parents' Support for Career

Parental Support for Career	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Supportive	71.2%	85.4%	81%
Somewhat Supportive	16.9%	6.3%	9.5%
Neutral/No Opinion	5.1%	6.3%	9.5%
Somewhat Opposed	6.8%	1%	0%
Very Opposed	0%	1%	0%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.26. Frequency of Respondents' Conversations with Parents Regarding Finances

Frequency of Conversations with Parents Regarding Finances	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Often	23.7%	40.6%	22.6%
Occasionally/Sometimes	64.4%	54.2%	63.1%
Never	11.9%	5.2%	14.3%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.27. Frequency of Respondents' Conversations with Parents Regarding Academics

Frequency of Conversations with Parents Regarding Education (Classes, Major, Selection of Academic Affairs, etc.)	Class of 2015
Very Often	47.5%
Sometimes	47.5%
Never	5.1%
	n = 61

Table 3.28. Frequency of Respondents' Parents' Advice Regarding Academics

Frequency of Parental Advice Regarding Education	Class of 2015
Frequently suggest changes to academics	6.8%
Sometimes suggest changes to academics	35.6%
Rarely suggest changes to academics	35.6%
Never suggest changes to academics	22%
	n = 61

Table 3.29. Frequency of Respondents' Parents' Changes to Academics

Frequency of Parental Changes to Academics	Class of 2015
Make frequent changes to academics	3.4%
Make some changes to academics	3.4%
Make rare/minimal changes to academics	22%
Do not make any changes to academics	71.2%
	n = 61

Table 3.30 Level of Respondents' Parents' Support for Academics

Parental Support for Education (i.e. academic decisions, choice of major, etc.)	Class of 2015
Very Supportive	79.7%
Somewhat Supportive	13.6%
Neutral/No Opinion	6.8%
Somewhat Opposed	0%
Very Opposed	0%
	n = 61

3.7 Qualifications of Adulthood

Finally, after looking at various measures of independence and parental involvement, I inquired about the respondents' personal definitions of adulthood. That is, I asked what they believe qualifies someone as "an adult". I then presented some traditional characteristics associated with adulthood, and asked how they important they believed these markers were in establishing adulthood. In addition

to ascertaining the relative importance of these factors, I also measured the respective ages they believed one should achieve these markers.

a. Importance of Traditional Adult Characteristics

Seniors

The seniors viewed financial independence as a very important indicator of adulthood, with about 68% saying it is “very important”, about 24% saying it is “somewhat important”, and only 8.5% saying it is “not important” (see Table 3.31). For residential independence, classified as no longer living with parents or guardians, they believed this was an important indicator of adulthood, but less so than financial independence- with 44% believing it is “very important”, about 46% believing it is “somewhat important”, and about 10% believing it is “not important” (see Table 3.32). Securing a full-time job was also viewed as a seemingly important characteristic of being an adult, with about 41% saying that being fully employed was very important and only 17% believing it was not important (see Table 3.34). Then, when asked how important it is for an adult to be finished with their formal schooling, only about 29% believed this was a very important indicator of adulthood and 34% believed it was not important at all (see Table 3.33). Marital status, either being married or being in a domestic partnership, was viewed as the least important in measuring adulthood, with only about 3% believing it was very important and over 60% believing it was not at all important (see Table 3.35). Finally, when asked if adults should be capable of supporting a family, the seniors actually found this to

be a relatively indicative quality, with 22% believing it to be very important and 32% believing it to be not important (see Table 3.36).

Thus, of these “traditional” characteristics of being an adult, the seniors appeared to find financial independence to be most important, followed by residential independence and securing full-time employment. Then, they found completion of formal schooling and capability to support a family to be less important, but still relevant, whereas marital status did not appear to qualify as an indicator of adulthood for this group. These findings appear to be relatively consistent with current trends observed in emerging adulthood; namely, shifting rates of first marriage and parenthood and growth in higher education (Arnett 2015). That is, as these milestones are now commonly coming later in the life course, if at all, it is interesting to see that seniors find them less important in qualifying adulthood. However, the relative importance still placed on financial and residential independence, and also in securing full-time employment, signifies that seniors do not appear to believe these statuses have become irrelevant.

Alumni

Conversely, the alumni groups assigned slightly different levels of importance to the indicator variables of adulthood than did the seniors. Ultimately, the majority of both classes found financial independence to be very important in qualifying as an adult (see Table 3.31). Looking at residential independence, only about half of the Class of 2014 found this to be very important, whereas the Class of 2010 had about 62% say this was very important (see Table 3.32). Completion of formal education was not as important to either alumni group, with 25% of the

Class of 2010 and 23% of the Class of 2014 finding it very important, whereas a respective 37% and 42% found this indicator not important at all (see Table 3.33). Then, looking at the importance placed on securing full-time employment, just over half, about 53%, from both the Class of 2010 and 2014 viewed this as a very important indicator of adulthood, with only 17% and 14% viewing this as not important (see Table 3.34). Similar to the seniors, both groups of alumni felt that being married, or in a domestic partnership, is not very important in classifying someone as an adult, with 63% from the Class of 2010 and 69% from the Class of 2014 saying it was not important at all (see Table 3.35). Finally, looking at the ability to support a family, a majority of each alumni class believed that this is at least somewhat important in establishing adulthood, with about 58% from the Class of 2010 and about 61% from the Class of 2014 saying it was either somewhat important or very important (see Table 3.36).

As such, it appears that the alumni found the traditional markers to be of slightly different importance than the seniors. For instance, although financial independence appeared to be very important for all three classes, residential independence increased in importance for each consecutive class. This was rather interesting, but I think it can be explained by the lack of experience that the senior class has in actually navigating the world of residential independence. That is, reflecting back to the discussions of residential status, these seniors have almost never had to venture into the housing market up to this point, seeing as almost all of them have only ever lived at home or at school. As such, their opinions on the importance of residential independence seem to indicate a lack of experience in this

realm of the adult world, one that the Class of 2014 and 2010 have had to navigate upon graduation. Apart from this, it appears that the seniors and alumni hold fairly similar views on what factors are and are not very important in qualifying adulthood.

Table 3.31. Respondents' Believed Importance of Financial Independence

Importance of Achieving Financial Independence	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	67.8%	71.9%	69%
Somewhat Important	23.7%	23.9%	19%
Not Important	8.5%	4.2%	11.9%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.32. Respondents' Believed Importance of Residential Independence

Importance of Achieving Residential Independence	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	44.1%	53.1%	61.9%
Somewhat Important	45.8%	37.5%	25%
Not Important	10.2%	9.4%	13.1%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.33. Respondents' Believed Importance of Completion of Formal Education

Importance of Finishing Formal Education	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	28.8%	22.9%	25%
Somewhat Important	37.2%	35.4%	38.1%
Not Important	33.9%	41.7%	36.9%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.34. Respondents' Believed Importance of Full-Time Employment

Importance of Securing Full-time Employment	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	40.7%	53.1%	53.6%
Somewhat Important	42.4%	33.3%	29.8%
Not Important	17%	13.6%	16.7%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.35. Respondents' Believed Importance of Marriage/Domestic Partnership

Importance of Being Married/In a Domestic Partnership	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	3.4%	2.1%	0%
Somewhat Important	33.9%	29.2%	36.9%
Not Important	62.7%	68.9%	63.1%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.36. Respondents' Believed Importance of Capability of Supporting a Family

Importance of Being Capable of Supporting a Family	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Very Important	22%	19.8%	22.6%
Somewhat Important	45.7%	41.7%	35.7%
Not Important	32.2%	38.5%	41.7%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

b. Expected Ages for Achieving Traditional Adult Characteristics

Seniors

Next, looking to expected ages of achieving these milestones, an overwhelming majority of the seniors believe one should achieve financial independence, residential independence, full-time employment, and completion of school between ages 23-29 (see Table 3.37, 3.38, 3.39, and 3.40). Furthermore, although the frequency varies slightly between these four indicator variables, the seniors mostly thought these should be accomplished between ages 23-25. Then, for marriage and capability of supporting a family, the responses shift to reveal that seniors expect these two statuses to be achieved later in the life course, if at all. For being married or entering a domestic partnership, almost half of the seniors indicated that there was no suggested age at which one should be married. Of the ones who did indicate suggested ages, they believed that marriage or partnerships should be achieved between ages 26-34 (see Table 3.41). This same age range was

also the most highly suggested for being capable of supporting a family (see Table 3.42).

Examining these expected ages for achieving these once “traditional” markers of adulthood, it is evident that the seniors expect adults to achieve financial and residential independence, full-time employment, and completion of school in their mid-to-late twenties. Conversely, they believe the prospect of marriage and starting a family should be expected in one’s late twenties to early thirties. These responses very accurately reflect the current trends that have been identified in shaping emerging adulthood; namely, the postponing of marriage and parenthood, the growth in higher education, and delayed entry into full-time employment positions.

Alumni

The alumni groups present some similar expected ages for these characteristics. A great majority of both alumni groups believe one should be financially and residentially independent and fully employed between the ages of 23-29, and, similar to with the seniors, the most common response for these three indicator variables was age 23-25 (see Table 3.37, 3.38, and 3.40). However, the alumni groups presented slightly different age expectations for finishing formal education. The Class of 2010 had a slightly higher count of people who thought formal education should be completed between ages 18-22, with about 11%. Also, the Class of 2014 had 50% of respondents suggest no expected age for completing one’s education (see Table 3.39). Looking to expected age of marriage or domestic

partnership (Table 3.41), the age range of 26-34 was most suggested for both categories, as with the seniors. But, more than half of both the Class of 2010 and 2014 suggested no expected age at which one should have a legal partner. Finally, for being capable of supporting a family, both groups of alumni showed similar results to the seniors, having a majority believe this should occur between ages 26-34 (see Table 3.42).

Thus, the expected age ranges for financial and residential independence and full-time employment were again in the mid-to-late twenties. However, these results indicate that the completion of formal education does not appear to have a time frame that the groups agreed upon. The lack of consensus regarding this variable is rather interesting because although the growth of higher education has been noted in research surrounding emerging adulthood, it appears that the age at which one completes their higher education is not as uniform. Finally, the alumni also expected marriage and children to occur later in the life course, again reinforcing the postponement of marriage and normalized delay in starting a family.

Table 3.37. Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Financial Independence

Age at which Adults Should Become Financially Independent	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	6.8%	5.2%	3.6%
23-25	61%	50%	48.8%
26-29	30.5%	38.5%	36.9%
30-34	0%	2.1%	6%
35+	0%	0%	0%
No suggested age	1.7%	4.2%	4.8%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.38. Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Residential Independence

Age at which One Should Become Residentially Independent	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	13.6%	7.3%	9.5%
23-25	62.7%	61.5%	60.7%
26-29	18.6%	22.9%	19%
30-34	1.7%	3.1%	0%
35+	0%	2.1%	0%
No suggested age	3.4%	3.1%	10.7%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.39. Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Completion of Formal Education

Age at which Adults Should Be Finished with their Formal Education	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	3.4%	3.1%	10.7%
23-25	30.5%	10.4%	21.4%
26-29	16.9%	29.2%	23.8%
30-34	5.1%	6.3%	4.8%
35+	3.4%	1%	0%
No suggested age	40.7%	50%	39.3%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.40 Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Full-time Employment

Age at which Adults Should Become Fully-Employed	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	5.1%	7.3%	9.5%
23-25	49.2%	49%	53.6%
26-29	37.3%	28.1%	20.2%
30-34	0%	7.3%	7.1%
35+	0%	0%	0%
No suggested age	8.5%	8.3%	9.5%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.41. Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Marriage/Domestic Partnership

Age at which Adults Should Be Married/In a Domestic Partnership	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	0%	1%	0%
23-25	1.7%	0%	3.6%
26-29	30.5%	22.9%	16.7%
30-34	16.9%	19.8%	23.8%
35+	1.7%	0%	0%
No suggested age	49.2%	56.3%	56%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Table 3.42. Respondents' Believed Expected Age of Capability of Supporting a Family

Age at which Adults Should Be Capable of Supporting a Family	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
18-22	0%	2.1%	1%
23-25	5.1%	1%	0%
26-29	23.7%	26.1%	22.6%
30-34	39%	38.5%	40.5%
35+	3.4%	3.1%	3.6%
No suggested age	28.8%	29.2%	32.1%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

c. Personal Definitions of Adulthood

Seniors

Finally, after looking at how important the respondents believed these characteristics to be in defining adulthood and at what ages they believe these should be achieved, I asked what they believe is actually necessary and sufficient in classifying someone as an adult. For this variable, the respondents were told to

select any and all variables they felt would qualify someone as an adult. For the seniors, the most frequently selected variables were “financial independence”, “residential independence”, and “feeling like an adult”, all with over half the respondents believing these three qualified one as an adult and with financial independence being the highest at 78%. Then, slightly less than half believed the characteristics of “fully-employed”, “having set goals or plans for the future”, and “achieving past goals” qualified someone as an adult. The lesser-chosen variables were “finished with formal education”, “capable of supporting a family”, and “being employed in a job one would consider their career”, and then “married” was the least popular choice. These findings indicate that seniors believe that, similar to earlier analysis, financial and residential independence are two very important markers of adulthood, and the majority believes that achieving them would classify one as an adult. The high support for requiring someone to *feel* like an adult was interesting because this had not been evaluated in previous questions, but here this measure was seen as highly necessary to qualify someone as an adult. That is, seniors not only believe one should achieve tangible classes of independence, but they should also mentally *feel* like an adult, a very intangible measure. The responses regarding full-time employment and completion of formal education are consistent with the earlier findings in that less of the seniors believed achieving these statuses would be sufficient to classify someone as an adult, just as these measures were not seen as all too important measures of adulthood. Then, the lack of necessity for marriage in being considered an adult was also consistent with the lack of importance seniors had placed on marriage in the previous sections, and the

same can be said for capability of supporting a family. The variables regarding past and future goals and plans were rather interesting because almost half the seniors believed having goals and plans would qualify one as an adult, but less so thought it was actually necessary for someone to have already achieved their previous goals. I think these findings reflect the concept of “forward motion”, reviewed in some of the literature, where emerging adults and their parents do not expect huge steps or accomplishments right away, but instead just find it necessary that one be working towards what they ultimately want. Finally, the lesser need that one be employed in a job they would consider their career was also interesting. I believe this also reflects back to the earlier findings regarding emerging adults and their volatile employment prospects, with less people starting a “career” but instead taking many different positions and opportunities.

Through interviews, the seniors were able to further explicate their definitions of adulthood beyond these quantitative means, and the results were very enlightening. For instance, when asked “what do you think qualifies someone as “an adult”?”, Kathleen responded with,

“I think it means something different to everyone, and I think it’s more of a concept than something someone actually ‘is’. I definitely think it’s important to have financial stability and be able to support yourself, but I think it’s also important to be able to make smart choices on your own, versus reaching a hardship & relying on your parents to help you through it.”

So here, she highlighted the importance of adults having financial independence and being able to support themselves financially, but also believes one should be able to support themselves *emotionally* and not rely on their parents

when facing hardships. Similarly, Teena also identified a two-pronged definition of adulthood, explaining,

“I think it depends. Financially, it’s about being able to support yourself fully. But mentally, I think it can amount to any age. I think it comes down to the way you deal with things and I think becoming an adult means you need to be able to handle yourself... So I guess being an adult is about being mentally aware and financially aware, not just one or the other.”

Then, Emily did not see the necessity in having any achieved statuses, instead believing adulthood to come strictly from mentality, saying,

I think it’s definitely a mentality or attitude, not dependent on age or some kind of status. I think having independence is important, but independence as in being able to think and take action by yourself, then deal with any consequences independently. I think a lot of people believe it has to do with physical situations (like finances, age, emotional standings, responsibilities, family...), but I see it more as an awareness or mentality than just like reaching some benchmark”.

Alumni

Among the alumni, the achievement of financial independence was still considered to be the major qualification of being an adult by a sizeable amount, with 84.5% from the Class of 2010 and 81.3% from the Class of 2014. Residential independence was again the next most popular choice, but only a little more than half of each class, about 54%, believed this was enough to qualify someone as an adult. Then, half the Class of 2014 had “feeling like an adult” as a qualifying characteristic of adulthood, whereas the Class of 2010 had 41.7%. Similarly, half of the Class of 2014 had “having set goals/future plans” and the Class of 2010 only had 35.7%. Next, “fully employed” and “achieving past goals” both had higher counts for

the Class of 2014 than Class of 2010- with 36.5% and 32.3%, respectively, from the Class of 2014, then 27.4% and only 16.7% from the Class of 2010. The variables of “capable of supporting a family” and “being employed in a job considered as a career” were then the next common, and “married” being the least common qualification of adulthood.

It appears financial independence is a major symbol of adulthood across the classes such that once one becomes financially independent of their parents or guardians, members of all three groups would most likely be classified as “an adult”. Residential independence, although slightly less necessary for alumni, is another prominent indicator of adulthood according to these three groups. Similarly, the alumni also recognized that personal identification, or “feeling like an adult”, is also relatively necessary, again enforcing a more intangible condition rather than a definitive status. In general, the Class of 2014 found all of the variables more necessary in qualifying one as an adult than the Class of 2010, the only two exceptions being financial independence and completion of formal education where the numbers are slightly higher for the Class of 2010.

Despite these findings, the personal definitions of adulthood for the alumni also varied, similar to the seniors. That is, the alumni subjects did cite certain characteristics as crucial to being an adult, but they also commented on the difficulty in qualifying adulthood, along with inconsistent views of others regarding their provided definitions of adulthood.

For instance, Katie believes financial independence, full-time employment, and independence in decision-making are the crucial factors to being an adult, but she also notes that not everyone accepts this view in full, saying,

“I think being an adult means being able to fully support yourself- like living independently, paying bills, having a full-time job, and making decisions independently.... But I do know some people from college- some who are married with kids- who would consider themselves adults but still receive financial support from their parents. I think in that sense, it might be dependent on how you were raised- how you were raised defines how you view yourself as being an adult or not.”

In this sense, she believes that although certain measures are seemingly required to be an adult, there are some who do not necessarily meet these requirements in full yet may exhibit other measures that they personally believe qualify themselves as adults. As such, Katie has her own definition of adulthood, but notes that not everyone holds the same definition or the same values.

Somewhat similar, Kelly also attributed financial independence to achieving full-fledged adulthood, but she also introduced the concept of goal-orientation to her definition, saying,

“I think being an adult means being financially independent, but also having a clear understanding of one’s goals and how to get there... I think knowing what you want and having both short and long-term goals are important. I also think it’s important to have a sense of what makes you happy. I think some people go through life with no sense of that, and I think that being an adult involves realizing what makes you happy. Also, having a clear understanding of what your passions are because those will lead to making the right goals and making yourself happy.”

As such, she introduces more subjective measures of adulthood that involve not just achieving certain statuses, but instead, having a clear sense of interests and passions, and also the ability to make adequate plans in order to achieve such goals.

Other alumni also cited more subjective means of qualifying adulthood, speaking more to levels of maturity. Bill described his idea of an adult by saying,

"I think when it comes down to it, it's about maturity. Not necessarily financial independence or living on your own, but more about how you carry yourself and how you act. It's just something in people where you know it when you see it... But I don't think there's any 'minimum criteria' for becoming an adult, just instead to behave how adults behave... Like, for instance, I know this guy... He's in his 30's and I know he still lives at home, but to me, he's an adult. The way he carries himself and the way he acts, almost paternal, is 'adult'. And I don't really know anything about his financial situation or anything, but to me, he's an adult."

Lee also had a similar concept of adulthood, rejecting the notion that adulthood comes from measures like financial independence but instead explaining that one becomes an adult when they generally attain full independence in responsibilities and also an ability to "manage yourself". Additionally, Lee believed that parents could still contribute financially or residentially and this would not inhibit one from being an adult, as long as that sense of maturity and personal responsibility was present. Cory also cited a very similar definition, saying,

"I think being an adult is about admitting you are no longer connected to parents and making decisions on your own. I think you can live at home and still be an adult, because it's more about your mindset and ability to make your own decisions."

In addition to citing maturity as a determining factor of adulthood, many alumni also identified the concept of “forward motion”. That is, they believe that adulthood entails having a plan or set goal, and working towards that goal. Derek described this by saying,

“I would say an adult is someone who has an idea of what they want to do and are very serious about it and working towards it. I don’t think it’s really dependent on having a full-time job or being done with school, because there are adults who are still in grad school and such. And I also don’t think it’s dependent on success or salary. I think it’s more about being passionate about something and being serious enough to work towards it.”

As such, he does not find it necessary to completely achieve certain statuses like financial independence or full-time employment, but instead believes that having serious goals and dedicating the time and effort to work towards those goals classifies one as an adult.

Shea had a similar belief about the necessity of goal-orientation and productive planning, saying, “I guess [an adult is] someone who is working towards independence. It’s not necessarily dependent on achieving that independence quite yet, but working towards it”. Again, this definition of adulthood does not require one to have achieved all measures of independence or employment, but instead just requires the presence of calculated and worthy steps toward such measures.

Table 3.43. Respondents' Believed Characteristics to Qualify as "Adult"

Characteristic that Qualifies One as an "Adult"	Class of 2015	Class of 2014	Class of 2010
Financial Independence	78.3%	81.3%	84.5%
Residential Independence	60%	54.2%	54.8%
Finished with Formal Education	20%	15.6%	20.2%
Fully Employed	41.7%	36.5%	27.4%
Married	10%	2.1%	6%
Capable of Supporting a Family	38.3%	24%	16.7%
Feeling like an Adult	51.7%	50%	41.7%
Having Set Goals/Plans for the Future	48.3%	50%	35.7%
Achieving Goals/Plans from the Past	40%	32.3%	16.7%
Being Employed in a Job One Would Classify as Their Overall "Career"	25%	25%	13.1%
	n = 61	n = 96	n = 84

Chapter 4: Conclusion

After reviewing these results, we turn back to the overall focus of this research- the level of parental involvement in the lives of emerging adults and its potential influence. My analysis involved several variables utilized to assess the various levels of parental involvement across the three groups in my sample, and each variable points to a unique aspect of emerging adulthood that warrant further discussion.

I began with assessing the financial status of the members of these three groups through measures of loans and finances in general, as well as the ability to pay for extra expenses. Both of these measures revealed that the likelihood of financial independence increases with age, or rather, with years following graduation. That is, the seniors who have yet to graduate were very financially dependent on their parents, whereas the recent alumni were slightly less dependent yet still exhibited reliance on their parents, and the oldest alumni were most successful in becoming financially independent from their parents. However, consistent with previous studies on emerging adulthood, there were still large counts from all three classes who were neither completely dependent nor independent, but instead relied at least partly on parental support (Arnett 2015). These results reflect how financial independence has become an increasingly obscure mark of adulthood, one that is now being achieved later or, in some cases, not actually achieved in full. As one of the major identifying factors of becoming an adult, this “aged” and declining trend in being able to completely support oneself

financially raises several questions about this generation of emerging adults and their parents. Namely, does this trend represent a generation experiencing heightened costs with more limited opportunities for financial gain, or does it represent a generation with children and parents who are simply not “cutting the cord”? In my surveys and interviews, I simply focused on parental levels of financial support and frequency of discussions involving finances. In some cases, respondents elaborated on the nature of these conversations, but a more interesting study from a larger and more diverse sample could be made to focus specifically on the nature of these discussions and potential agreements between parents and their young adult children. That is, speaking with both emerging adults as well as parents about their financial arrangements could uncover how the financial status of emerging adults is dealt with by families, such as if there is a certain age or status at which the cord will be strictly cut, or if there are other factors that determine continued financial support.

Then, residential status was another measure in which these three groups exhibited similar trends in parental support. As to be expected, the seniors yet to graduate were almost entirely residentially dependent on their parents, whereas these figures were less for the alumni. However, a considerable amount of the most recent alumni have returned home to live with their parents, whereas almost all of the older class no longer lives with their parents. Additionally, the levels of parental support for living expenses, such as paying for rent or room and board, are very similar to the physical residential status of these young adults, with seniors almost relying totally on parents, and the alumni relying less and less with respect to their

graduation year. Thus, levels of parental support for this measure of adult life seem to decrease over time, but there are cases in which alumni reported still living at home or returning home at some point following graduation. Again, as a noteworthy measure of overall self-sufficiency and independence, these trends in residential status inspire further inquiry.

This increase in the likelihood of returning home was cited as a common occurrence in today's generation of emerging adults, but residential instability in general could be seen as a more important measure of emerging adulthood (Newman 2012). That is, although it is noteworthy how many young adults are returning to live in their childhood homes under the wing of their parents once again, it is also worth recognizing that people who have not moved home are not necessarily living on their own or "settled" in a place they would call their permanent "home". Instead, a more common avenue pursued by young adults now is to live with roommates, with a temporary lease, and with the knowledge that they could live somewhere completely different anytime in the near future, depending on their employment or educational opportunities.

Similar to uncovering more about the trends in increased financial support, it would be interesting to further analyze the nature of the discussions between young adults and their parents regarding living arrangements. For instance, some respondents who had returned home felt the need to explain their circumstance in full and provided further insight regarding their agreements with parents regarding their current living situation. However, it would be interesting to review more about the conversations involving residential status between emerging adults and their

parents to uncover how their decisions regarding living are or are not affected by parental involvement. Also, in relation to other studies on emerging adulthood, it might be interesting to hear from parents of emerging adults regarding their thoughts about their children returning home following graduation, and whether or not there are other conditions involved in allowing their children to live at home again (Newman 2012).

Overall levels of overall parental involvement, measured by the frequency and extent of conversations with parents, also exhibited similarly declining trends based on graduation year. That is, seniors reported having the greatest levels of parental involvement, both in an advisory role but also authoritative role regarding decision-making. Then, older alumni reported considerably smaller counts of such parental contribution in these arenas. However, similar to residential trends, the class of most recent alumni exhibited significant levels of parental involvement in their post-graduate lives. Thus, although their parents might have a lesser role than they did prior to graduation, these young adults still keep close contact with their parents, still involve them in their daily lives and important decisions, and still defer to them a certain amount of authority, more so than older alumni. As such, this measure again reveals that parents are playing a fairly active role in the lives of their children even around ages 22 to 24 and although these roles appear to decrease over time, this involvement is still observed almost halfway through one's twenties. Again, these variables mostly involved the frequency and extent of interactions with parents, but further studies could focus on more subjective measures of these

interactions between emerging adults and their parents, or also involve questions for parents about their perceived roles in their child's daily life and decisions.

Next, the trends in employment and employment prospects for these three groups reflected that the alumni were fairly successful in achieving full-time employment, and the seniors have also been proactive in finding and securing positions as well. However, one of the more interesting trends relating to these measures of current and future career aspects related to the type of employment that these three groups have pursued, and also their current pursuit of other opportunities. That is, respondents exhibited high rates of continued education, one of the noted characteristics further delaying the complete transition to adulthood (Smith 2011). There were also noticeable rates of additional opportunities not necessarily for education or specific employment purposes, but instead to gain experience for their desired career or even, in some cases, to discover their desired career. Furthermore, a great majority of those currently employed in a full-time position are also still actively searching for a new position and foresee themselves switching jobs in the very near future. Some respondents provided further insight that revealed their change of position could even involve switching fields entirely or going back to school to learn an entirely new trade. This delayed entry into career-oriented positions, as well as the continued search for new positions and potentially drastic changes in the employment of these three groups, speaks to larger employment trends of young adults as a whole.

As noted in previous research, today's emerging adults are entering the workforce at a fairly volatile time for the American economy and as such, their

employment practices are reflecting an increased need for higher education, and in most cases, supplemented by non-academic opportunities (Smith 2011).

Additionally, these emerging adults are also exhibiting greater instability and variation in their own choices and decisions regarding career-orientation. I believe, if I could have delved into this further, analysis into these career-shifts further as they related to parental involvement and guidance would have been very interesting. That is, today's emerging adults appear to be more comfortable leaving their job and uprooting themselves to pursue different paths or fields of interest, and I would be curious to know how secure they feel in doing so and why; namely, whether or not this security comes from their own confidence in their abilities or planning, or the knowledge that their parents will provide them with support in the event that their plans don't work out.

In addition to these individual measures as they related to the respondents in my study, the ways in which these respondents actually defined and qualified adulthood were also incredibly informative. Not only did these groups exhibit the aforementioned characteristics of emerging adulthood- such as delayed financial and residential independence, or increased pursuit of higher education- in their own personal accounts, they also conveyed one of the crucial components of the phenomenon of "emerging adulthood"- its obscure and unclear definition. When prompted about what qualifies one as an adult, these groups did highlight that certain measures, such as financial independence or employment, are seemingly important to becoming an adult, but these groups did not expect such measures to be achieved until at least the mid-to-late twenties, if at all. In addition, almost all

interview respondents, who had the most flexibility in their answer, noted that they did not believe such traditional measures defined someone as an adult, but instead believed adulthood to be representative of more subjective measures of maturity and responsibility. Their responses very accurately encompass current theories surrounding emerging adulthood- namely that emerging adulthood is commonly characterized as a stage in the life course represented by delayed achievement of these traditional markers of adulthood, but ultimately, this phase varies greatly in definition and identification on an individual basis (Arnett *et al.* 2011).

Overall, these three groups of Union students each provided further insight for three unique positions in the path to adulthood. Their personally achieved statuses, as well as their future plans, were reflective of trends that have recently come to characterize “emerging adulthood”, and their own personal definitions of “adulthood” further exemplify the complexity surrounding this newly-recognized part of the life-course. Specifically looking to parental involvement, the focus of my research, these participants illustrated the continued presence of parental support in this period of emerging adulthood, and also identified future areas of analysis that could prove useful in further assessing this existence in emerging adulthood.

Ultimately, in addressing my original question surrounding levels of parental involvement in the current and future lives of emerging adults, it appears that the increased presence of parental support in emerging adulthood has become more common and normative, but, also, the action of being “cut off” has become less imperative in defining one as “an adult”. That is, although young adults might be relying on their parents for additional support and for longer periods of time, the

presence of such support is becoming less indicative of one's status as an adult. As these three groups have indicated, the act of being "cut off", or becoming completely independent at a specific point in time, appears to be greatly diminishing in popularity and relevance, but has instead been seemingly replaced by a more continuous or fluid transition to independence, a "thinning" of support instead of a direct halt. Thus, it appears when asking whether one has "cut the cord" between parent and child, we should instead ask "how thin the cord has become".

Now, when assessing what this means in the greater realm of society, I believe this analysis is two-pronged. First, I believe that certain greater macro-level forces, such as increased financial instability and volatility in the job market, have negatively affected all of society, especially emerging adults, and has led to a heightened need for outside support for this group. As noted, it has become increasingly more required to pursue higher degrees of education and gain extensive experience in order to be a marketable employee. Pursuing such opportunities also requires emerging adults to pay exponentially increasing amounts to supplement such activities before they have actually secured a job that will pay for these pursuits in full. The culmination of such factors has contributed to the increased need for parental assistance, whether in the form of financial or residential support, based on the inability of emerging adults to support their costs and living expenses individually. As such, if our society was to move away from its heightened meritocracy, and instead provided greater opportunities for emerging adults to enter adult roles without spending multiple years attaining advanced

qualifications, I believe this would ultimately create less need for parental assistance and a greater ability to actually “cut that cord”.

Second, although this lessened ability of young adults to completely detach from parents appears to be somewhat of a step backward, I ultimately believe this is instead a shift in societal norms. Young adults today no longer aspire to settle down, pay their own bills, and start a family in their early 20's. Instead, they want to explore many different opportunities in their employment, relationship, and residential statuses; they are placing greater importance on expanding their education and finding not just employment, but a career they are truly interested in; and they are doing all of this without a heightened emphasis on measures such as financial independence. Instead, parents of emerging adults are, for the most part, supportive of their child's decisions, and are thus more willing to provide additional support through financial or residential means so their child can fully explore greater opportunities. As such, I believe that the increased levels of parental involvement in the lives of today's emerging adults are reflective of this shift in normative behaviors, along with being responsive to macro-level shifts in the American landscape.

Appendix A: Online Survey Questions for Seniors

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Hometown
4. Occupation/Employment
5. Major Area of Study at Union College
6. Highest Level of Education of Parents
7. Graduating Class at Union College
8. Overall, what do you think qualifies someone as “an adult”?
9. Did you take out loans for tuition at Union College?
10. If so, under whose name are these loans?
11. Where are you currently in the loan-payment process?
12. How are you repaying your loans?
13. How would you characterize your current living situation?
14. How are you financing your current living expenses?
15. How are you financing your other expenses?
16. How would you describe your current financial situation?
17. In general, how involved are your parents/guardians in your daily life?
18. About how often do you communicate with your parents?
19. How often do you discuss your academic affairs with your parents?
20. To what degree have your parents been supportive of/opposed to your academic affairs?
21. To what degree have your parents suggested changes to your academic affairs?
22. To what degree have your parents interfered with/made changes to your academic affairs?
23. How often do you discuss your current career goals/objectives with your parents?
24. To what degree have your parents been supportive of/opposed to your current goals?
25. To what degree have your parents suggested changes to your current goals?

26. To what degree have your parents interfered with/made changes to your current goals?
27. How often do you discuss your finances with your parents?
28. If you do receive support from others, about how long do you think it will take you to achieve complete financial independence?
29. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be financially independent?
30. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be living on their own?
31. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be finished with education/schooling?
32. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be fully-employed?
33. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be married?
34. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be capable of supporting a family?
35. At what age do you think adults should be financially independent?
36. At what age do you think adults should be living on their own?
37. At what age do you think adults should be finished with education/schooling?
38. At what age do you think adults should be fully-employed?
39. At what age do you think adults should be married?
40. At what age do you think adults should be capable of supporting a family?
41. What are your plans immediately following graduation?
42. At this point in time, where are you in the process of solidifying these plans?
43. How permanent are your immediate post-grad plans?
44. How do your immediate post-grad plans relate to your overall career goals?

Appendix B: Online Survey Questions for Alumni

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Hometown
4. Occupation/Employment
5. Major Area of Study at Union College
6. Highest Level of Education of Parents
7. Graduating Class at Union College
8. Overall, what do you think qualifies someone as “an adult”?
9. Did you take out loans for tuition at Union College?
10. If so, under whose name are these loans?
11. Where are you currently in the loan-payment process?
12. How are you repaying your loans?
13. How would you characterize your current living situation?
14. How are you financing your current living expenses?
15. How are you financing your other expenses?
16. How would you describe your current financial situation?
17. In general, how involved are your parents/guardians in your daily life?
18. About how often do you communicate with your parents?
19. How often do you discuss your current career goals/objectives with your parents?
20. To what degree have your parents been supportive of/opposed to your current goals?
21. To what degree have your parents suggested changes to your current goals?
22. To what degree have your parents interfered with/made changes to your current goals?
23. How often do you discuss your finances with your parents?
24. If you do receive support from others, about how long do you think it will take you to achieve complete financial independence?
25. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be financially independent?
26. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be living on their own?

27. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be finished with education/schooling?
28. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be fully-employed?
29. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be married?
30. In your opinion, how important is it for adults to be capable of supporting a family?
31. At what age do you think adults should be financially independent?
32. At what age do you think adults should be living on their own?
33. At what age do you think adults should be finished with education/schooling?
34. At what age do you think adults should be fully-employed?
35. At what age do you think adults should be married?
36. At what age do you think adults should be capable of supporting a family?

Appendix C: Interview Questions for Seniors

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Major
4. Hometown
5. Graduating Year
6. Describe your current living situation (at Union, while on break).
7. Where do you plan to live upon graduating (immediately, after the summer)?
8. Describe your current financial status.
9. Describe your relationship with your parents in general.
10. Describe your current post-grad plans/where you are in the process of planning.
11. In your own words, what do you think qualifies someone as “an adult”?
12. Based on your own definition, would you qualify yourself as “an adult”?

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Alumni

1. Age
2. Gender:
3. Undergraduate Major:
4. Hometown:
5. Current Location:
6. Graduating Year
7. Describe your transition and/or major events, starting from when you graduated Union and up to now.
8. Describe your current occupation/employment status.
9. Describe your current living situation.
10. Describe your current financial status.
11. Describe your relationship with your parents in general.
12. Describe your current career objectives and future goals, and where you are in the process of planning.
13. In your own words, what do you think qualifies someone as “an adult”?
14. Based on your own definition, would you qualify yourself as “an adult”?

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