

**Emerging Adulthood:  
New Risks and Possibilities  
of Ages 18-29**

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# Four Revolutions Since 1960

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- **Technology Revolution: Longer and more widespread education required**
- **Sexual Revolution: Tolerance of premarital sexuality, cohabitation**
- **Women's Movement: Later ages of marriage and parenthood**
- **Youth Movement: Ambivalence about adulthood**
- **A new life stage: emerging adulthood**

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- **Median Marriage Age (Females) in Selected Countries**

- **Industrialized Countries    Age    Developing Countries    Age**

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• ISRAEL	25	Egypt	19
• United States	28	Ethiopia	17
• Germany	30	Ghana	20
• France	30	Nigeria	18
• Spain	30	India	18
• Japan	29	Indonesia	21
• Australia	29	Guatemala	19





# Five features of emerging adulthood

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- 300 interviews with 18-29-year-old Americans, diverse in ethnicity, educational attainment, and social class background.
- National sample of over 1,000 Americans ages 18-29
- Similar results found in Israel.
- Identity explorations
- Instability
- Self-focus
- Feeling in-between
- Possibilities/optimism



# Identity explorations

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- “This is a time of life for finding out who I really am”  
77% of Americans ages 18-29 agree
- Love: searching for a “soul mate”  
---”When you marry, you want to find your soul mate, first and foremost.” 94% of Americans 20-29 agree.
- Work: searching for self-fulfillment; money is not enough  
“It is more important to me to enjoy my job than to make a lot of money.” 79% ages 18-29 agree
- Searching for a meaningful life: Israelis and others (Ofra Mayseless, U. of Haifa)

# Instability

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- “This time of my life is full of changes.”  
84% of Americans ages 18-29 agree
- Median job changes ages 18 to 29: Ten
- In Israel, too. Dina, age 27: “At this stage I am supposed to decide which track to take at the university. There are tracks that are very relevant to my current work. But I have to decide between these and my dreams: something related to movies. In the end, I always go after my dreams.” (Shulman et al., 2014).







# Self-focused

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- More independent, not tied to others
- “This is a time of my life for focusing on myself.”  
71% of Americans ages 18-29 agree.
- “I think I want to get more in touch with myself. I want to be a little selfish for awhile, and selfishness and marriage don't seem to go hand in hand. I'd like to be able to experience as much as I can before I get married, just so I can be well-rounded.” (Rosa, 24 year-old Latina)

## ... but not selfish

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- “It is important to me to have a career that does some good in the world.”

86% of Americans ages 18-29 agree



# Feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood

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- Not yet fully adult, and definitely not “kids” or “adolescents”
- Adults in some ways but not others.
- Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?
- 18-21: 32%; 22-25: 52%; 26-29: 68%
- “I’d have to say I’m not 100% an adult, and maybe I don’t want to be. What’s the hurry? I have my whole life to be an adult, you know.” Rob, age 24

# What makes an adult?

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- **Accept responsibility for yourself**
- **Make independent decisions**
- **Become financially independent**
- **The Big Three, worldwide, including Israel**



# Possibilities / optimism

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- “I am confident that eventually I will get what I want out of life.”  
89% of Americans ages 18-29 agree
- “I believe that, overall, my life will be better than my parents’ lives have been.” 77% ages 18-29 agree
- “Better economically. Better personally. I just think by the time my parents reached my age, they'd already run into some barricades that prevented them from getting what they wanted, personally and family-wise. And so far, I've avoided those things, and I don't really see those things in my life. I don't like my job. I'm frustrated about the lack of relationships with females. But in general, I think I'm headed in the right direction.” (Bob, 23 year-old European American)

# Risks of ages 18-29

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- High rates of substance abuse, sexual risk behavior, eating disorders, depression, anxiety.
- Nearly half of 19-25 year-olds in U.S. have had a psychiatric disorder in past year (Blanco et al., 2008).
- “I often feel depressed.” 32% of 18-29s
- “I often feel anxious.” 56% of 18-29s



# What makes Israeli EAs distinct?

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- Religious diversity
- Compulsory military service...
- ... then a long identity-exploring trip
- Jewish history and perpetual state of conflict

# Don't forget the good news

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- “This time of my life is fun and exciting.”  
83% of 18-29s agree
- “At this time of my life I feel I have a great deal of freedom.” 81% agree
- At this time of my life, it still seems like anything is possible.” 83% agree



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- “Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties,” by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Oxford University Press. 10th anniversary edition just published.
  - *Getting to 30: A parent’s guide to the twentysomething years (with Elizabeth Fishel).*
  - [www.jeffreyarnett.com](http://www.jeffreyarnett.com)
  - Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood, [www.ssea.org](http://www.ssea.org)