

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENT
AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS'
CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADULTHOOD

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This study used the conceptualization of emerging adulthood (a newly proposed phase in the lifespan that is attributed to demographic and societal shifts extending the time period in which young people feel as if they are in-between and neither adolescent nor adult) to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of college student adulthood. Specifically, the research questions examined differences by generational status (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) on the importance of the 34 individual criteria that comprise adulthood (Arnett, 2001; Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007) and the importance of these criteria when grouped into the five subscales of emerging adulthood: role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity.

An online survey of student affairs professionals produced 654 respondents. Results from statistical analysis indicated that the most important criteria for student affairs professionals in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood are accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions, developing greater

consideration for others, becoming less self-oriented, being financially independent from parents/guardians, and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult. Overall, generational status did not result in dramatic differences in student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood. Regardless of their generational status, almost half (46%) of the student affairs professionals in this investigation did not believe that traditional undergraduates just entering college were adults but when these same students graduate, almost three-quarters (72%) of the student affairs professionals respondents believed that the traditional students were full-fledged adults.

Findings confirmed that student affairs professionals' criteria for adulthood are similar to those of traditional college students and parents (Nelson et al., 2007), but also revealed a significant disconnect in the timeline that student affairs professionals deemed necessary for the achievement of adulthood as compared to traditional college students and their parents. These results have implications for both higher education research and professional practice as they highlight the conflicting expectations of students and parents as compared to student affairs professionals and higher education as a whole regarding the role that the college milieu plays in the achievement of adulthood.

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS'
CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ADULTHOOD

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From my first day as a doctoral student, I joked with the members of my cohort that we just had to, "Get 'er done!" But the completion of a doctoral program is not a sprint to the finish line; it is a marathon. There is nothing that a runner loves more than to hear supporters ringing cowbells for encouragement along the way. I am honored to have this opportunity to acknowledge some of my most vigorous cowbell shakers during my academic race:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As an exploratory investigation of student affairs professionals' conceptualization of adulthood, this chapter begins with an overview of the changing views of adulthood in American society and outlines the purpose of the study. A brief synthesis on the theoretical conceptualization of adulthood is presented, and as student affairs professionals' conceptualization of adulthood will be assessed by generational status, the literature on the generational differences of student affairs professionals is reviewed. Next, the population of student affairs professionals is introduced through a very brief history of the role of student affairs in higher education. The chapter closes with a reiteration of the problem statement and the research questions associated with this research study are outlined. Key terms are identified throughout, and finally, the significance of the research is presented.

Changing Views of Adulthood

For over a century, human development scholars have regarded human life as occurring in distinct stages including childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age (Erikson, 1968; Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2005). The idea that these life stages are culturally defined based on changing economic and social conditions is now a widely accepted notion among scholars (Furstenberg et al., 2005). Additionally, there is agreement that changing economic and social conditions produce new behavior patterns that, in modern societies, are “swiftly diffused in the form of new social norms, institutional arrangements, social affiliations, and personal identities” (Furstenberg et al., 2005, p. 3).

For the majority of the twentieth century, Western society has held a “traditional” conceptualization of adulthood comprised five core transition markers – finishing school, leaving the parental home, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children (Hogan & Astone, 1986; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer, & Erikson, 2005). Achievement of just one of these markers in isolation is not sufficient to be considered an adult, so the transition to adulthood is best described as a process rather than an event (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Over a period of time, most young people will achieve all of the roles that define adulthood, but even those who do not fulfill every role (i.e., those who do not have children) are still socially recognized as adults (Hogan & Astone, 1986).

While the transition markers for adulthood remained relatively the same throughout the twentieth century, recently shifts have occurred in the social timetable for transitioning to adulthood (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). In the first few decades of the twentieth century, young people took a longer time to “come of age” because even though they typically finished schooling by their late teens and began working, many could still not afford their own living arrangements separate from family. Other young people during this time period chose to remain at home to support natal family and prepare to support a family of their own. These types of decisions resulted in a delay in marriage and child-bearing (Furstenberg, 2010; Furstenberg et al., 2005; Settersten & Ray, 2010). The economic turbulence of the Great Depression also significantly slowed the timing of family formation, but with the end of World War II, economic and social conditions rapidly changed. The postwar boom allowed for young people in their twenties to marry and have children almost in lockstep with the

completion of their schooling. High-paying industrial jobs were plentiful, so those with and without college degrees were able to secure jobs with benefits while Social Security provided for older family members thus enabling young adults to leave the natal home earlier than their parents had. According to Settersten and Ray (2010):

By the 1950's and 1960's, most Americans viewed family roles and adult responsibilities as being nearly synonymous. For men, the defining characteristic of adulthood was having the means to marry and support a family. For women, it was getting married and becoming a mother; indeed most women in that era married before they were twenty-one and had at least one child before they were twenty-three. By their early twenties, then, most young men and women were recognized as adults, both socially and economically. (p. 21)

Thus these patterns established from the mid-1940's through the mid-1960's became the hallmark of the "traditional family" and the standard by which trends of the latter twentieth century and early twenty-first century are compared (Furstenberg, 2010).

Similarly, during the mid-twentieth century, American higher education practices and the work done by student affairs professionals also transformed to reflect the "traditional" pattern of expectations for early adulthood. Prior to the 1960s, universities and colleges were considered responsible for all aspects of academic and personal development of students – "from libido to laundry" (Altschuler & Kramnick, 1999, para. 4) – in the same way that parents were responsible for their children who were minors (Bowden, 2007). But with the 1961 ruling in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*, the concept of the university

acting *in loco parentis* or in place of the parent was rejected. Per the 1971 ratification of the 26th amendment of the Constitution that standardized the legal voting age to 18 in every state, institutions of higher education underwent a tremendous shift to recognize that when a student reached the age of 18 or the “age of majority,” the student was considered to have most of the full legal rights as an adult (Bowden, 2007).

Thus for 40 years, American universities and colleges as well as those in American society have embraced the notion that when traditional college students arrive on campus, they should be treated as legal adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008). A traditional college student is one who enrolls in college almost immediately upon graduation from high school so falls into the 18- to 23-year-old age range. This type of student typically attends school full-time, is not financially independent from his or her parents, and does not yet have his or her own children (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996).

Adults continue to mature throughout their lives though, so while universities consider traditional students to be adults, there are still aspects of students’ physical, mental, and moral development that the college experience impacts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995). The college or university setting can be likened to a practice field where students can test out their newly acquired adult competencies in an environment that still provides housing accommodations, directed educational and social activities, adult and peer support, and health and wellness support. “[Universities] are explicitly designed to bridge the family and the wider society and, increasingly, have been tailored to provide the sort of semiautonomy that

characterizes early adulthood” (Furstenberg et al., 2005, p. 20). But, in American society, by the time students graduate from college, they are expected to be capable of heading into the “real world” on their own (Shanahan, 2000).

Even though present day society maintains the traditional view that adulthood is achieved when young people are in their early twenties and our higher education system’s policies and practices reinforce this view, economic and social conditions began shifting in the 1970’s indicating to human development scholars that the process of becoming a full-fledged adult was once again becoming more gradual (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Psychologist Jeffery Arnett (1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006a) is one of the scholars who has tracked various demographic, economic, and societal shifts within American society and from these observations has proposed a new period in the lifespan called emerging adulthood. Arnett has posited that as a result of these changing demographic and societal shifts, there is a prolonged period during which young people feel that they are neither adolescent nor adult and are inextricably linked to family relationships. In short, Arnett suggests that today’s youth move from adolescence in their late teen years into emerging adulthood throughout their early to mid-twenties and then into adulthood only in their mid- to late-twenties. Subsequent studies based on the conceptualization of emerging adulthood (Badger, Nelson & Barry, 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) have revealed that both traditional college students and their parents alike believe that the students are not yet adults during the college years.

From the higher education perspective, the increased connection between traditional students and their parents has been detected in the documented increase in

the presence and involvement of parents in their students' lives at colleges and universities across the country (Savage, 2005; 2007). While Asian, African, and Latino cultures have been recognized as being more collectivist and interdependent in their nature including during the college years (Mattanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004), closer connections between college students and their parents are being noted for all ethnic backgrounds including White students (Savage, 2005; 2007; Taub, 1997). This is a significant shift from over twenty years ago when Cohen (1985a) noted that for most student affairs professionals, "the concerns of our students' parents are marginal in our day-to-day work" (p. 1) and "we do not consider parents part of our client population" (Cohen, 1985b, p.3).

Today, most colleges and universities recognize parents as valuable partners in reinforcing messages that the schools want to delivered regarding health concerns, retention, and graduation as well as serving as personal background information resources if students experience difficulties (Wartman & Savage, 2008). This is reflected in the increased allocation of funding and personnel to provide direct programming and services for parents and families (Savage, 2005; Savage, 2007). Additionally in 2009, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education approved a set of functional area standards for Parent and Family Programs (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009).

The creation of parent and family program professional standards, the burgeoning number of parent- and family-focused offices on campuses across the country, and numerous publications and commentary pieces written by student affairs professionals addressing the increased and prolong connection between students and

their parents (e.g., Carney-Hall, 2008; Coburn, 2006; Keppler, Mullendore, & Carey, 2005; Wartman & Savage, 2008) are just a few pieces of evidence within higher education that the pendulum is swinging back to the early twentieth century time period when the process of becoming an adult was a more prolonged experience. Yet simultaneously, the student development theory utilized by student affairs professionals and the profession of student affairs as a whole still considers traditional college students to be adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008). Due to conflicting policies, laws, and social practices, traditional college students are afforded “adult rights” in certain contexts (e.g., can vote, join the military, obtain driver’s license), but in other contexts, the same students are viewed as being “less than adults” (e.g., cannot legally drink alcohol until age 21, must report parents’ income on financial aid forms) which creates a disconnect or binary of expectations between traditional college students and student affairs professionals.

Purpose of the Study

While evidence exists that emerging adulthood, a new and unique period in the lifespan, has developed within our society (Arnett, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006a; Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007), no empirical literature exists regarding student affairs professionals’ perceptions of emerging adulthood. As individuals who work directly with and on the behalf of traditional students who fall into the proposed life stage of emerging adulthood, the perceptions of student affairs professionals regarding college student adulthood could have implications for higher education policy and practice with both students and their parents. Yet as evidenced by the literature reviewed thus far, economic and social

conditions have shifted enough over the twentieth century that student affairs professionals of varying ages and therefore different generational statuses have experienced very different social environments that may have influenced their perceptions of what constitutes adulthood. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Student affairs professionals were categorized in one of three generational statuses (Baby Boomer, Generation X, or Millennial) and the five subscales of emerging adulthood were utilized in analysis.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Adulthood

All institutions of higher education have educational goals that they require students to achieve in order to graduate, but there are also general developmental outcomes that the institutions would like students to achieve by the conclusion of their college experience. One commonly assumed college outcome is that of autonomy or independence which “refers to the degree of freedom students feel from the influence of others in their choices of attitudes, values, and behaviors” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 222).

Becoming autonomous from parents is a process that occurs during late adolescence, the period in the lifespan when traditional students are in college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kenny, 1994; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). A series of studies on college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) provided evidence of increases in independence from parents from first to third or fourth year. In general, these studies suggested that since students are nearing the end of adolescence while in

college, they continued to become more and more of their own person and increasingly took responsibility for their self-support. Specifically, first-year students were found to be psychologically more dependent on their parents than third- and fourth-year students (Lapsley, Rice & Shadid, 1989; Rice, 1992). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) warned though that these studies and the others that they cite are all based on small, single-institution samples of opportunity, so they cautioned drawing too many conclusions from the body of work. Additionally, the two longitudinal studies conducted indicated no movement toward autonomy from first to third year and the surprising finding that securely attached students were more dependent on their parents than insecurely attached students (Rice, FitzGerald, Wahley, & Gibbs, 1995). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the longitudinal nature of these studies “lends somewhat more weight to their findings compared with the other studies, which were cross-sectional” (p. 223).

Given this context, consideration of the new conceptualization of emerging adulthood is interesting as it suggests that demographic and societal shifts have extended the time period (from roughly ages 18-25) in which young people feel in-between in that they are neither adolescent nor adult and are still inextricably linked to family relationships (Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 2006a). Emerging adulthood is based on the societal shifts that include the rise in the median age for marriage and first child birth which is predominantly caused by increased college enrollment and then taking time to secure a desired occupation. This delay is creating space in the lifespan, thus making room for a new period of interaction between parent and child distinct from adolescence but not yet considered adulthood. Unique challenges facing

parents and emerging adults include parental acknowledgement of the emerging adult status, development of filial and parental maturity in that parent and child begin to see one another as equals who can both provide support to one another, and interplay of autonomy and dependency needs in that the emerging adult might be seen legally as an adult but economic realities require a continued financial dependence on parents (Aquilino, 2006).

Emerging adulthood's criteria for adulthood have been broken into five subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity (Arnett, 2001; Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007). Briefly, role transitions refers to marital status, education level, parental status, and full-time employment status, norm compliance includes behaviors such as driving safely, having one sexual partner at a time, and avoiding behaviors such as drunk driving and illegal drug use, and biological/age-related factors refers to growing to full height, having had sexual intercourse, and becoming biologically capable of bearing/fathering children. Family capacities are gender-specific roles within traditional cultures such as being capable of supporting a family financially, running a household, and caring for children and relational maturity involves accepting responsibility for one's actions, managing one's emotions, and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult.

If the psychological development of traditional college students is being delayed beyond the time that they have graduated (approximately age 23) as is posited by emerging adulthood, then what impact does this developmental shift have on the way student affairs professionals work with college students? How does this

developmental shift influence student affairs professionals' perceptions of students' achievement of adulthood, a student outcome that has traditionally been assumed to be heavily influenced by the college experience? This investigation addressed these questions, but one additional characteristic of student affairs professionals as a population was considered when examining their perceptions of emerging adulthood.

Given that student affairs professionals range widely in age, the differences between three distinct generations of professionals (i.e., Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers) were examined as these are the three generational statuses that are currently working on American college and university campuses. Evidence exists that within the workplace different generational groups have very different values, ideas, communication methods, and approaches to completing assignments as well as significantly different motivational and engagement preferences (Anand, 2009; Mills, 2009; Morukian, 2009). As multigenerational employees have different interpretations of their environment and experiences (Morukian, 2009), it was reasonable to conclude that different generational groups may have different perceptions of the elements necessary for a young person to be considered an adult. Currently, no evidence was available to support or refute that student affairs professionals who are members of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, or Millennial generational groups have different perceptions of students' achievement of adulthood, so this investigation sought to fill that gap in the literature.

Generational Statuses of Student Affairs Professionals

One method that student affairs professionals use to better understand the students with whom they work is to apply generational literature that utilizes a cohort

approach (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Using a cohort approach to understand students has been employed by many researchers since the mid-1960s to illuminate distinctive characteristics of a generation (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Levine and Cureton (1998) state:

There is a preoccupation in this country with searching out the distinctive characteristics in every new generation of young people, the ways in which the current generation seems different from the last. We then apply an appropriate sobriquet that somehow captures the salient features of the age. (p. 2)

Although some have criticized generational frameworks as being based on generalizations and stereotypes and lacking in rigorous evidence and thorough support for assertions (Brooks, 2000; Fogarty, 2008; Hoover, 2007, 2009), many student affairs professionals have successfully utilized the generational framework to better understand students in relation to their mental health (Howard, Schiraldi, Pineda, & Campanella, 2006), ethnic background (Bonner, 2010), interactions with faculty (Bonner, Marbley & Howard Hamilton, 2010), relationships with their parents (Savage, 2008; Watkins & Supple, 2008), and to compare and contrast students on campus today with those from past years (Freeman & Taylor, 2009). Conversely, this framework can be applied to student affairs professionals to better understand similarities and differences between professionals in varying age groups.

According to Coomes and DeBard (2004), Strauss and Howe provide the most extensive articulation of a cohort or generational model. Strauss and Howe (1991) define a generation “a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of

life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (p. 60). They posit that there are four phases of life, elderhood (age 66-87), midlife (age 44-65), rising adulthood (age 22-43), and youth (age 0-21), each of which have a central role that is distinct. Youths, for example, are trying to foster dependence through growing, learning, and acquiring values while the central role for adults is activity meaning that they are working, starting families and livelihoods, and testing their values. These roles follow the work of life-span developmentalists such as Erikson, Levinson, and Chickering (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The second aspect of Strauss and Howe’s (1991) definition is that each generation has a peer personality, meaning a profile of a prototypical member. Specifically, they define a peer personality as “generational persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 64).

The recognition by members of a generation that they are distinct from other generations occurs when one generation interacts with the members of another generation. Additionally, how the different generations experience “social moments” or historical events that radically alter their social environment provide further delineation between generations (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The interactions between generations and experience of social moments results in the “generational diagonal” which “acknowledges that generations are not static; they move through time influencing and being influenced by important historical events (events Strauss and Howe see as inner-oriented ‘spiritual awakenings’ and out-oriented ‘secular crises’) and other generations” (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p.8).

Morukian (2009) provided a simple definition of a generation as being “a cultural group comprised of people born in a certain era who may share values, attitudes, and behaviors based on similar experiences and world events that occur in their lifetimes” (p. 9). Utilizing this definition, the three generations of student affairs professionals currently working on American college and university campuses - Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers - are briefly introduced here. A more thorough discussion of each generation’s characteristics will be presented in Chapter Two.

The youngest of the student affairs professionals’ generations are the Millennials. This group was born between 1982 and 2002 meaning that today’s college students as well as the youngest of the new professionals on campus both belong to this generational group. It should be noted though that current college students and new student affairs professionals represent only half of the Millennial generation as those Millennials born between 1994 and 2002 are still in grade school, middle school, and high school. Millennials are described as being optimistic, techno-advanced, civic-minded, confident, open-minded, and the most diverse of all the generations. Examples of events that they have experienced together and which bond them as a generation include being the first generation to always have the Internet present in their upbringing and daily lives, the events of 9/11, and the genocides in Rwanda (Morukian, 2009).

Student affairs professionals referred to as being part of Generation X were born in the twenty-year period from 1961-1981. Defining cultural events in this group’s lives included the rise of computers in the workplace and home, both parents

entering the workforce, and becoming latchkey kids while defining historical events included the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of apartheid. Generation X is known for maintaining a work-life balance, being self-reliant, pragmatic, informal, and technologically literate as well as being globally oriented (Morukian, 2009).

The eldest generational cohort amongst student affairs professionals are the Baby Boomers who were born between 1943 and 1960. This generation has experienced all of the same defining world events as the Millennials and Generation X, but unique events unto their generation include desegregation, the Civil Rights movement, women entering the workplace in larger numbers, and the 1960s counterculture movement. This group is known as being individualistic in their orientation, optimistic, work-driven, focused on their personal health and wellness, and team-oriented (Morukian, 2009).

The goal of this exploratory study was to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood, but as no research had been conducted to date on this population in relation to perceptions of adulthood, it was unknown if perceptions would differ significantly based on age. Classifying student affairs professionals by generational status categories provided the opportunity to examine responses not just of those in a similar age range but also by groupings of those who have experienced similar social, political, and historical moments at a similar point in their lifetime. These commonly shared generational events may have influenced the way in which the particular generation cohort perceive the world around them and provide a better description how different student affairs professionals perceive of college student adulthood than the demographic

variable of age alone. While this study intends to classify student affairs professionals into generational categories and found merit for doing so in the context of an exploratory investigation, Morukian (2009) reminds us of the complexities of generational labeling:

...within any generation multiple cultures exist; and within any culture, multiple generations exist. No matter what culture, ethnicity, race, gender, or religion, a person represents, age plays a huge role in the way people communicate and understand one another. It is also important to recognize that, in addition to a shared identity base on historical events and cultural norms, a natural bond may be created among individuals who are in the same age bracket simply because of their common life experiences. Our values, opinions, perspectives, and behaviors are bound to change as we age, regardless of world events and the popular culture of our time. (p. 9-10)

The Evolution of Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education

As student affairs professionals were the primary population of interest in this investigation, this section provides a very brief overview of the evolution of the field within the higher education. Comprehensive student affairs programs at today's colleges and universities can be traced back to the founding of colonial colleges (Nuss, 2003). Dormitories, dining facilities, and libraries were core components of the collegiate experience in addition to time spent in the classroom. In all of these locations, faculty viewed their students who were typically in their mid-teens as "immature adolescents requiring counsel, supervision, vocational guidance, and, frequently, remedial classes. Colonial colleges were empowered to act in loco

parentis and were therefore free to develop and enforce rules and regulations as if they were the parents” (Nuss, 2003, p. 55). The idea of the extracurriculum arose in the nineteenth century, which included clubs and societies, campus publications, sports, and Greek-letter organizations (Hirt, 2006; Nuss, 2003).

Hirt (2006) indicated that it was after the Civil War that college personnel were first assigned to specific roles relating to non-classroom experiences of students. Three factors lead to these new roles: 1) presidential roles were becoming more complex so they had less time to devote to students, 2) females were being admitted to some institutions for the first time so institutions needed to employ women to monitor and chaperone them, and 3) faculty became more focused on the creation of knowledge so had less time to spend on non-instructional activities. These shifts in institutions lead to the creation of student affairs positions in admissions, academic advising, registration and records, and health services. Student affairs truly came into its own in the twentieth century with a vast expansion of programs and services for students and the publication of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) and the *Student Personnel Point of View Revised* (American Council on Education, 1949) which served as the foundation of the profession (Hirt, 2006).

As the sizes of institutions increased over time, the numbers of student affairs professionals grew in proportion to serve the student populations (Rentz, 1996). With the growth of the number of professionals, their roles became more and more specialized. Today, there are two distinct types of student affairs professionals: those who work in functionally-based programs such as admissions, judicial affairs, and

housing and those who work with services for specific student populations such as LGBT students, veteran students, and students of color. Working within the latter category (which in general are newer to the profession and receive less support from institutions) requires a thorough understanding of the particular population and the ability to disseminate information about various campus functional areas and services to faculty, administrators, and campus constituents (Hirt, 2006).

Statement of Problem

As this introductory chapter outlined, student affairs professionals work in college cultures built on the premise that college students are adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008) but social and economic changes in recent years have shifted in a way that elongates the time taken for young people to achieve the traditionally accepted markers of adulthood (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). Developmental literature has posited the new developmental period of “emerging adulthood” as an explanation for this prolonged period of students feeling as if they are neither an adolescent nor an adult (Arnett 1997; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2006a). Additional studies (Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) indicate that both parents and students believe the conceptualization of emerging adulthood to be a valid and legitimate period in students’ lives.

Currently, no research exists regarding student affairs professionals’ perceptions of emerging adulthood despite student affairs professionals’ direct, daily contact with the emerging adult population. If student affairs professionals are consistently working with students displaying the developmentally prominent features of emerging adulthood, their perceptions of students as “adults” may begin to shift.

Such a shift would mark a significant transition in how the profession of student affairs views students in relation to being adults. Additionally, a shift in student affairs professionals' views on adulthood could have a profound impact on the philosophies they draw on when working with students and the types of programming offered to both students and their parents to aide in student development and growth.

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the conceptualization of emerging adulthood via the concept's five subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity. The study was exploratory as the population of student affairs professionals had not yet been examined in relation to the conceptualization of emerging adulthood.

The six research questions that guided this investigation included:

1. What criteria do student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses (i.e., Baby Boomers born from 1943 and 1960, Generation X born from 1961-1981, and Millennials born from 1982-2002) consider important to achieve adulthood? Does the importance of these criteria differ if analyzed using age as a continuous variable rather than being grouped into generational statuses?
2. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of role transitions in their conceptualization of adulthood?
3. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of norm compliance in their conceptualization of adulthood?

4. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of biological/age-related factors in their conceptualization of adulthood?
5. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of family capacities in their conceptualization of adulthood?
6. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of relational maturity in their conceptualization of adulthood?

Significance of Study

Results from this study contributed significantly to the literature on and understanding of the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. This study added to the virtually nonexistent literature surrounding student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a relatively new proposition that research suggests traditional college students and their parents are embracing. In addition to their parents, student affairs professionals are a set of adults that traditional college students have the opportunity to interact with on a consistent basis during emerging adulthood. Therefore, it was deemed useful to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood to determine areas where perceptions of students and their parents coincide or diverge. This knowledge can assist student affairs professionals in developing programming as well as policy to better meet the needs of emerging adults and their parents.

In addition to contributing to the understanding of emerging adulthood, this study contributed to the limited research on generational differences within the profession of student affairs. The profession as a whole currently encourages traditional college students to focus on developing their identity to the point of

achieving independence and autonomy. This study provided unique insight into if student affairs professionals of varying ages or generational groups truly agree with general notion that traditional college students are adults. Again, the revealing of differences by generational status can encourage dialogue as to if current practices and policies within the profession should be modified given shifts in the thinking of students, their parents, and in the general American culture as to what constitutes adulthood.

Summary

This chapter outlined how human development scholars have been documenting the elongation of the process to become an adult in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Simultaneously over the past 15 years, student affairs professionals have documented relationships changing between traditional college students and their parents, a phenomenon which is explained by the new theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. An argument was made that since student development theory and the profession of student affairs as a whole consider traditional college students to be adults, it was a useful venture to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood. This study was considered an exploratory investigation as student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood have never been gauged in a systematic way. In particular, this study examined if different generational groups of student affairs professionals perceived of adulthood in significantly different ways that has implications for higher education policy and practice with both students and their parents.

This chapter presented literature the theoretical conceptualization of adulthood as well as a review of generational differences between student affairs professionals. The population of student affairs professionals was introduced through a brief discussion on the evolution of student affairs within higher education and finally, the research questions for the study were presented and the significance of the study was outlined.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Understanding student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood requires a review of literature of three distinct areas of the higher education, human development and psychology research bases. Both theoretical and empirical research will be examined in regarding views of traditional college students as adults including adolescence, adulthood, and the new conceptualization of emerging adulthood as well as conceptualizations of generations and generational views of adulthood.

Theoretical Views of Traditional College Students as Adults

The review of literature begins with a synthesis of the theories regarding conceptualizations of adulthood. As was introduced in the first chapter, movement from life stage to life stage is considered a process (Hogan & Astone, 1986). Traditional theories on adolescence proposed by psychologists and utilized in the work of student affairs professionals in the latter portion of the twentieth century describe the movement from adolescence to adulthood as a process of separation from parents in order to achieve independence and autonomy. Theories on development during the adult years similarly address and describe the transition from adolescence into adulthood as an important part of the adulthood process. These adolescence- and adulthood-focused theories describing both the process of achieving adulthood and current conceptualizations of adulthood are presented in this section. The new theoretical conceptualization of a developmental period that has been proposed to exist between adolescence and adulthood – emerging adulthood – is then outlined in detail. Finally, critiques of emerging adulthood will be addressed.

Late Adolescent Separation and Individuation Resulting in Autonomy and Independence

Conceptions of individual autonomy date back to the Renaissance, but American perspectives truly took form during the industrial revolution and the subsequent increase in division of labor. According to Hill and Holmeck (1986), “an extensive division of labor meant an intensely individualistic society. From this perspective, it is not surprising then, given industrialization and specialization, that individual autonomy has played such a central role in the American value system” (p. 145). Following this line of thinking, human development theory has traditionally emphasized psychological separation from family and the development of autonomy and individuation as central tasks of late adolescence (Kenny, 1994; Mattanah, et al., 2004; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Hill and Holmbeck (1986) concur indicating that autonomy is ubiquitous in literature on adolescent development:

Whether we speak of parent-child conflict, of multiple perspective-taking, or self-efficacy, or of field independence, there is the likelihood that detachment or autonomy will be invoked as an orienting or explanatory device – core construct, stage or developmental task – when research, practice or policy in relation to adolescents is considered. (p. 146)

Blos’s theory of adolescent disengagement.

Early theories of adolescent development traditionally assumed a positive relationship between psychological separation and life adjustment (Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994) and characterized this time period as one of unavoidable psychological turmoil (Kenny & Rice, 1995). Blos’s (1979) psychoanalytic theory of

adolescent disengagement discussed five sequential phases of adolescent development culminating in consolidation of character and personality formation (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). The adolescent in part achieves this individuation by detaching from his/her parents through de-idealization in that he/she no longer see parents as powerful infallible figures, but rather see them in a more realistic light. The first three stages of disengagement (preadolescence, early adolescence, and adolescence) are therefore characterized by “spite and revenge” relationships with parents in that adolescents try to hurt them as they no longer meet their expectations. The fourth phase (late adolescence) and fifth phase (postadolescence) are times of consolidation, ego synthesis, and character and personality formation by integrating personality components into a functioning whole (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). In these last two phases, the adolescent successfully disengages from parents and achieves the goal of becoming a separate person.

Chickering’s theory of psychosocial development.

While the separation theory discussed above spans across the adolescent years, Chickering’s theory of psychosocial development (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) focused specifically on traditional college students’ experience of autonomy development and defined separation as the physical distancing of oneself and individuation as becoming one’s own person and increasingly taking responsibility for one’s self-support. Chickering proposed an identity development schema of seven vectors of development that students move through, interact with one another, at times revisit, and eventually build on one another leading to “greater complexity, stability, and integration as the issues related

to each vector are addressed” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 38). The vector addressing separation-individuation was originally called developing autonomy and focused primarily on learning independence and self-sufficiency (Chickering & Reisser, 2005), but was later renamed moving through autonomy toward interdependence with autonomy referring to the task of developing self-sufficiency, taking responsibility for one’s personal goals, and being less swayed by the opinions of others (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson & Barnes, 2005).

Autonomy development occurs primarily in the early college years and involves three components: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Fostering emotional independence implies that one does not need continual assurance and positive feedback from others while the development of instrumental independence refers to the ability to complete tasks and solve problems in a self-directed manner. The last component of interdependence involves an understanding of responsibilities to one’s community and society as a whole. The process of gaining emotional independence “involves some level of separation from parents, increased reliance on peer, authorities, and institutional support systems, and growing confidence in one’s own self sufficiency” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 117).

Arrival at college is a natural starting point for autonomy development, but parents can assist students prior to their departure for school by encouraging autonomy at home and helping their student develop appropriate skills to manage anxiety and uncertainty (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Other parents will elect to create some distance with their student. If the disengagement process is mutual

between parent and student, it can yield beneficial results, but if the process is one-sided, it can cause disappointment and discomfort.

Bloom's theory of adolescent/parent separation.

Bloom (1987) offered a perspective on the process of separation-individuation by developing a five-stage theory of adolescent/parent separation, a process he views as “a natural life change, initiated by healthy development and encouraged by the culture” (p. 232). Additionally, adolescent/parent separation theory has synchronous characteristics to theories of loss and bereavement. Of the theoretical frameworks previously outlined, Bloom was the first to specifically recognize that the process of separation is experienced by all those involved with the close interpersonal connections that are being reorganized and hence has special meaning to not just the adolescent, but also for the parties who are “left behind” (Bloom, 1987). For separation to occur, parents must relinquish the control that they have traditionally held by fulfilling the many needs of their child so that new ways of relating can be established. Bloom posited that this formulation of new ways of relating is similar to the process of loss and therefore can trigger numerous responses ranging from mild to powerful and overwhelming so must be negotiated carefully as these reactions can provide either developmental or constricting experiences.

Bloom's (1987) adolescent/parent separation stages, which generally are linear but can be revisited by both adolescents and parents, begin with control of the impulse to remain attached in which the adolescent starts to test parental limits and becomes hypercritical of parents as their idealized notions of parents begins to diminish. Increasingly uncomfortable with him or herself, the adolescent often

downplays their dependence on their parents in many areas, but then at other times behaves in ways that exaggerate dependence. Stage two, cognitive realization of separation, involves the adolescent cognitively proving to him or herself, parents, and others that he/she is becoming more independent which can lead to continual bickering about a wide variety of topics from household rules and limits to politics and morality. While an adolescent might state that he/she wants and is capable of limited parental authority, in reality the adolescent still derives security from it, so parents need to gradually relinquish control in this stage, carefully monitoring the adolescent's changing abilities in relation to personal responsibility (Bloom, 1987). Affective response to the separation, or stage three, refers to the strong feelings experienced by both adolescent and parents in relation to the separation in their relationship. The adolescent and parents need to develop a trusting relationship that balances increased autonomy while maintaining a loving and caring relationship rather than equating autonomy with total emotional rejection. Experiencing feelings of grief and pride in the emergence of adulthood helps to mitigate the process of separation for both parents and the adolescent (Bloom, 1987).

Once the separation has been confronted and mitigated, the fourth stage of the identification process is entered. Now more secure in their newfound independence, the adolescent is ready to establish a new sense of identity and there is a conscious and unconscious pull to incorporate parents' valued qualities, even those that may have previously been rebelled against, if they are somewhat redefined (Bloom, 1987). Simultaneously, parents must redefine their concept of family and "find alternative ways of achieving the gratifications previously derived from the close, dependent,

parent/child relationship” (Bloom, 1987, p. 249) thus relinquishing the former relationship. The fifth and final stage, development of a new relationship, entails the establishment of an adult/adult relationship between parent and young adult which also allows the young adult to forge new types of intimate relationships with others, make significant commitments, and create a sense of stability and identity (Bloom, 1987). These five stages in combination will undoubtedly evoke a great deal of stress, but Bloom (1987) believed the “process usually proceeds in a way that allows both parent and offspring to better adapt and to meet their needs in the future” (p. 250). Finally, Bloom (1987) concluded:

For the adolescent, separation from parents represents a major experience of loss and a major development in assuming adult responsibility and status. As such, it serves as a prototype for future separation experiences and is an important transition in the life course. It is obvious, then, that a successful resolution of these tasks is essential for healthy development. (p. 264)

Conceptualizations of Adulthood

Research in the twentieth century primarily focused on the sequential developmental periods experienced in the first twenty years of life (prenatal, infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, pubescence, and adolescence), so theoretical and empirical research on adult development is still considered to be in its infancy (Levinson, 1986). Historically then, it has then been assumed that “development is largely completed at the end of adolescence,” (Levinson, 1986, p.4) and society does not have a common language to describe the series of age levels after adolescence.

This absence of adult development language stems from “the lack of any cultural definition of adulthood and how people’s lives evolve within” (Levinson, 1986, p. 5). In the context of this investigation, it is important to have an understanding of current conceptualizations of adulthood so as to better understand how student affairs professionals make determinations as to if their students have achieved adulthood. Therefore, this section will review the small body of work that has been generated by traditional and contemporary theorists outlining adult development.

Erikson’s stages of ego development.

Erikson (1968) proposed the psychosocial process of ego identity development that occurs over a lifetime as one traverses through eight age-linked, sequential stages with the primary goals being “achievement of a cohesive ego identity and development of mature interpersonal relationships” (Schultheiss & Bluestein, p. 248). A psychosocial crisis indicates the entry into a new stage and through resolution of the crisis an individual completes certain developmental tasks and acquires new skills or attitudes.

Of Erikson’s eight-stage model, the final three stages provided an organized scheme for the description and study of development during the adult years (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981). Having moved through the fifth stage, adolescence, where the personal identity has struggled with identity vs. role confusion, Erikson (1968) posited that the individual resolves confusion over bodily changes and relationships with peers and parents to emerge with a new sense of identity. During the sixth stage of young adulthood which occurs the twenties and thirties, individuals attempt to balance intimacy vs. self-absorption (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981).

Intimacy involves relating sexually but also caring and sharing in that the needs and concerns of someone else's are equally important to one's own. "To have genuine concern for another, one needs a cohesive sense of personal self and relatively little fear or anxiety about losing oneself in giving to another, whether it be on the intellectual, emotional, or sexual plane" (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981, p. 31). If intimacy cannot be achieved, isolation and self-absorption may result.

The seventh and eighth stages of Erikson's model are middle adulthood and maturity. Middle adulthood occurs during the forties and fifties and involves care and facilitation of a younger generation (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; Marcia, 2002). Maturity, which occurs in the sixties and beyond, is period when an individual either experiences integrity because he or she considers life to have been relatively successful with more satisfaction than regret or despair because he or she views their life as a series of missed opportunities (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981).

Overall, Erikson's stages of ego development allow for individuals in each stage to draw on new personal strength in order to overcome older weaknesses of self. His work provided the first consideration of the life course and how the self engages with the world (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; Levinson, 1986). Since Erikson, specific segments of psychology such as child development and gerontology have increased their understanding of specific aspects of the life span, but surprisingly little has been done to advance the general theory of adult development (Levinson, 1986). With Erikson's work as their primary influence, theorists Gould, Valliant, and Levinson have emerged with contemporary theories of adult development.

Gould's assumptions of absolute safety.

Roger Gould (1978) articulated a process of developmental steps in which adult consciousness is gradually achieved by overcoming deep, emotionally based childhood self-protective assumptions surrounding absolute safety (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989). The assumptions of absolute safety are present in childhood and include the notions that individuals will always live with their parents and be their children, parents will always be present to help when an individual cannot do something on his or her own, childhood simplified versions of reality are correct, and there is no death or evil in the world (Gould, 1978).

For Gould (1978), development occurred in four phases where false assumptions are present, developmental tasks must be achieved, and conflicts confronted and resolved. The first occurs from ages 16-22 and involves 'leaving our parents' world.' This phase corresponds to the first false assumption that children will always belong to their parents with the corresponding false components that additional independence will be a disaster, the world should be seen through parents' assumptions, and that only parents can guarantee safety and act as family. The second phase of 'I'm nobody's baby now' occurs from ages 22-28 and involves the false assumption that parents will step in and show an individual the way if they become overwhelmed. Component false assumptions include if one does what they are told, rewards will automatically follow and there is only one right way to do things. From ages 28-34, Gould (1978) indicated individuals are in the 'opening up to what's inside' phase with the major false assumption that life is simple, controllable, and there are no significant coexisting contradictory forces within

individuals. Notions that what one knows intellectually, they know emotionally; individuals are not like their parents in ways they do not want to be; individuals can see clearly see the reality of those close to them; and threats to individuals' security are not real are the component false assumptions to this phase. Finally, the 'midlife decade' phase happens from ages 35-45 in which the major false assumption is that death and evil do not exist and the sinister has been destroyed. Components of this major false assumption include that the illusion of safety can last forever; death cannot happen to the individual and loved ones; life does not exist beyond the family; and individuals are innocent.

Overall, to achieve adulthood, Gould required each individual to challenge and overcome the false assumptions from his or her childhood. If an individual is unable to move away from their childhood safety zones, they risk stagnation rather than continued development throughout their adult years (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981).

Valliant's hierarchy of adaptive mechanisms.

George Valliant (1977) conducted a longitudinal study on a White, male sample to examine mechanisms of defense and what constituted adaptation and successful intra-psychic development over the life course. From 1939 to 1944, 268 Harvard male undergraduates were chosen to participate in the study based on possession of the capacity for self-reliance. The group was followed for 40 years with a series of interviews and annual questionnaires. For Valliant's 1977 publication, he selected 95 of the men to interview extensively in an attempt to understand "what had gone right in their lives – not in what had gone wrong" (p. 46).

Based on these interviews and previously collected data, Valliant created a hierarchy of adaptive mechanisms at four levels. The first level included psychotic mechanisms which are common in childhood including denial of the external reality, distortion, and delusional projections. Immature mechanisms which are most common in adolescence include denial through fantasy, projection, hypochondriasis, passive –aggressive behavior, and acting out in delinquent and perverse ways. Level three involves neurotic mechanisms that are common in everyone and include intellectualizations via isolation, obsessive behavior, and rationalization, repression, displacement, and dissociation. Finally, fourth level adaptive mechanisms involve adaptive mechanisms that are common in “healthy” adults. These mechanisms include sublimation, altruism, suppression, anticipation, and humor.

Valliant believed that individuals’ ego mechanisms of defense must mature throughout the life cycle (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981). His longitudinal study indicated that “healthier members of the sample used more mature defenses in midlife than in adolescence or young adulthood and that conflict was an inevitable and integral part of development across the life course” (Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989, p. 72). Specifically, study participants as adolescents were twice as likely to use immature defenses as mature ones; as young adults, they were twice as likely to use mature mechanisms as immature ones; and in midlife, they were four times as likely to use mature as immature defenses (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981). Overall, Valliant associated maturation to external adjustment in that those who developed mature defenses were able to negotiate various stages of the life cycle with considerably more success than those with lesser adaptive mechanisms.

Levinson's four age-linked eras.

The final researcher to significantly contribute to contemporary theories of adult development was Daniel Levinson whose work is considered to be the most comprehensive (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989).

Levinson conceived the life cycle as a sequence of eras which are age-linked development periods lasting approximately 20 years. "Each era has its own biopsychosocial character, and each makes its distinctive contribution to the whole" (Levinson, 1986, p. 5).

Four eras and three transition periods comprised Levinson's (1986) conception of the life cycle. The first is preadulthood which extends from conception to approximately age 22 and is an era of biopsychological growth and after a few years, a young child is able to distinguish between "me" and "not me," the first step of the individuation process. From 17 to 22, the early adult transition occurs where individuation continues where the young adult adjusts relationships with family and the world to form a unique place in the world as an adult. By the end of the preadulthood era, development is completed for the most part and the individual has gained maturity as an adult (Levinson, 1986).

The second era of early adulthood extends from age 17 to 45 and is the "era of greatest energy and abundance and of greatest contradiction and stress" (Levinson, 1986, p. 5). During this time, the individual pursues three developmental tasks: 1) exploring occupation, marriage, and other relationship possibilities offered by the adult world; 2) establishing a preliminary self-definition as an "adult"; and 3) creating a niche in society (Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989; Levinson, 1986). This era culminates

in the midlife transition (roughly age 40-45) which is considered another step in individuation where individuals become more “compassionate, more reflective and judicious, less tyrannized by inner conflicts and external demands, and more genuinely loving of themselves and others” (Levinson, 1986, p. 5).

Middle adulthood is the third era in Levinson’s (1986) life cycle and lasts from about age 40 to 65. Although biological capacities may be lower than those of early adulthood, they are typically still sufficient for energetic, personally satisfying, and social valuable lifestyles. Individuals in this era are more “senior members” of their particular worlds and while responsible for their own work and maybe the work of others, also have the additional responsibility of developing the current generation of young adults as they soon will rise to the role of the dominant generation.

The final era is that of late adulthood which starts around age 60 and encompasses the late adulthood transition from age 60-65. This era involves many physiological changes, retirement, changes in family roles, confrontations with death and dying, and the evaluation of one’s life.

In examining the adult development models of Erikson, Gould, Valliant, and Levinson, it appears that by their early twenties individuals have differentiated themselves and matured to the point of being considered adults, but it should be noted though that one critique of all these models is that they were developed predominantly based on work with White, male populations. It is therefore possible that these models are not relevant for all cultural groups. Although it appears that development continues throughout the adult years and individuals must still engage in developmental tasks, this set of theories indicates that the general responsibilities and

characteristics of adulthood have been bestowed upon individuals in their early 20's. The following discussion on emerging adulthood provides an alternative trajectory to adulthood.

Emerging Adulthood as a New Developmental Period Between Adolescence and Adulthood

The two previous sections have discussed how social science researchers have outlined the “schedule” for coming of age in the United States from the perspective of late adolescence as well as in the early years of adulthood. As was discussed in Chapter 1, social and economic changes have recently occurred throughout the industrialized world leading to a “growing body of research that young people are taking longer to leave home, attain economic independence, and form families on their own than did their peers a half a century ago (Berlin, Furstenberg, & Waters, 2010, p. 3). In this research, the distinct developmental stage of emerging adulthood has been proposed as a new period between adolescence and adulthood.

Arnett (2000, 2004, 2006a) introduced the conceptualization of emerging adulthood that, given recent demographic and societal shifts, allows for a prolonged or extended timeframe in which young people feel in-between in that they are neither adolescent nor adult and are inextricably linked to family relationships (Arnett, 2006a; Aquilino, 2006). Arnett defined emerging adulthood as “the years from (roughly) 18 to 25 as a distinct period of the life course, different in important ways from the adolescence that precedes it or the young adulthood that follows it” (p. 4). The concept stressed the psychological and subjective experiences of individuals

during this age period and emphasized the period as one of identity exploration (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

Changing demographics in industrialized nations have led to the rise in the median age and expansion of the variance for both marriage (now commonly in the late twenties) and first childbirth (now commonly in the early thirties), much of which is attributed to participation in higher education and then finding a desirable occupation. These societal shifts have created space in the lifespan for a new developmental period that Arnett (2006a) outlined as having five features.

The first feature is the age of identity exploration when emerging adults are exploring life possibilities particularly related to relationships and work-life, choices that will serve as the basis of their adult life. Through clarification of individual identities, emerging adults discover who they are and what they want out of life and this period is one in which they can more freely explore these opportunities as they have not committed to substantial adult roles (Arnett, 2006a).

The age of instability as the second feature of emerging adulthood is marked by the high rate of residential changes including moves in and out of the family home and movement for educational reasons, cohabitating relationships, and/or work opportunities. The third feature of emerging adulthood is the self-focused age in the sense that “they have little in the way of social obligations, little in the way of duties and commitments to others, which leaves them with a great deal of autonomy in running their own lives” (Arnett, 2006a, p. 10). This time period does have a serious purpose in that emerging adults are attempting to master self-sufficiency which according to Arnett’s research (2004) is how they define adulthood.

The fourth feature of the age of feeling in-between results from 60% of emerging adults responding to the question, “Do you feel like you have reached adulthood?” by saying “in some ways yes, in some ways no” (Arnett, 2006a). This response is based on three criteria that these emerging adults indicated as being required markers of adulthood: accepting responsibility for self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent (Arnett, 2006). As these are all gradual processes, it takes the time period of emerging adulthood to become fully confident in these areas.

Finally, the age of possibilities is the final feature of emerging adulthood with two primary characteristics. First, it is a time of great optimism and high expectations for the future in relation to career and relationships. Second, it is a critical time for those who have experienced difficult upbringings to move away from home and take control of their future. For those who have experienced relatively stable family conditions, it is still a time to make independent decisions and create a unique identity. Both groups will take the influence of their family with them when they leave the home, but the possibility for change is the key aspect of this feature (Arnett, 2006a).

Since his first articulation of emerging adulthood, Arnett has emphasized that it is a demographic phenomenon based on later entry into stable adult roles. Love and work transitions that once took place in the late teens and early twenties moved to the late twenties and early thirties thus opening up a place for a new life stage (Tanner & Arnett, 2011). Proposing that emerging adulthood was distinct not just demographically but subjectively and psychologically thus situating the stage

between adolescence and young adulthood, Arnett also emphasized the content of these years would vary among cultures. But in the United States, Arnett's research revealed that the period of emerging adulthood marked a time when young people were 1) seeking identity, 2) experiencing instability, 3) focusing on self-development, 4) feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, and 5) optimistically believing in many possible life pathways (Arnett, 2004). These features of emerging adulthood have held up empirically via research completed using the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood in which internal reliability and test-retest reliability were high and emerging adults were found to be significantly higher on all factors related to the five features as compared to older adults and adolescents (Arnett, 2006a; Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007).

The work of Tanner (2006) complimented Arnett's argument of emerging adulthood as a distinct life stage as it posited that "distinct population features are reflected in individual pathways of development from adolescence, into emerging adulthood, and beyond to young adulthood (Tanner & Arnett, 2009, p. 40). Tanner forwarded the notion that the primary developmental task of emerging adulthood is recentering, a concept that "assumes the interdependence of development, and considers the individual-in-context with the unit of analysis that is changing over time" (Tanner & Arnett, 2009, p. 40). Recentering occurs in three stages: transitioning into emerging adulthood proper, engaging the developmental experiences of emerging adulthood, and making commitments to enduring roles and responsibilities (Arnett & Tanner, 2006; Tanner & Arnett, 2009). The first stage involves moving from relationships and roles that indicated dependence of guidance,

support, and resources toward relationships where power is shared, mutual, and support and care provide a greater level of reciprocity. The second stage allows for developmental experimentation in roles and relationships to inform themselves what options are available in these realms while also knowing the experiences are transitory and temporary. Finally, the third stage involves making true commitments to roles and responsibilities such as careers, marriage and partnerships, and parental roles.

The development that takes place as an emerging adult discovers, reevaluates, and experiences new interests, abilities, transitions, and behaviors has a significant impact on the family system. Simultaneously, family relationships continue to influence the development of emerging adults creating a “dual dynamic of individual and family change [that] creates some of the unique challenges that differentiate emerging adulthood from other phases of development (Aquilino, 2006, p. 193). Challenges for parents include first being able to verbally or actively acknowledge their child has reached a new level of maturity in their emerging adult status and second letting their child become a source of support to them (Aquilino, 2006). Parents must also be willing to actively seek out the support of their child when appropriate. For the emerging adult, this process involves seeing parents as individuals (not just in a parent role) and understanding their unique perspectives, life histories, needs, and point of view. A final challenge for parents the interplay of emerging adults’ autonomy and dependency needs in that there is often a “contradiction between society’s granting of (legal) adult status and autonomy while economic realities often necessitate a lingering dependency on parents” (Aquilino,

2006, p. 195) thus requiring parents and children to reexamine the nature of their interactions, mutual expectations, and possible impact on family dynamics.

Critiques of emerging adulthood.

While some consider emerging adulthood the most important theoretical contribution to developmental psychology in the past 10 years (Gibbons & Ashdown, 2006), the theory has been critiqued by notable scholars (Bynner, 2005; Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Two primary concerns about emerging adulthood arose in these discussions - the concept's inability to ever be applicable to all individuals and its lack of value added understanding of human development.

As an age-bound stage theory, emerging adulthood is problematic to some scholars because they believe it cannot explain individual transition across the life course because there will always be segments of the population that deviate from the norms outlined in stage theories (Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Hendry & Kloep, 2011; Kloep & Hendry, 2011). Rather than emerging adulthood being a universal stage, its applicability is dependent on the culture where the individual is developing and the current historical context which would imply that need for multiple, simultaneous stage theories. Bynner (2005) expressed that the experience of emerging adulthood is that in fact of middle class young people who attend college directly after high school and have substantial financial support from their parents. Because these college students are not as financially constrained, they have the ability to engage in the personal exploration that Arnett describes in emerging adulthood. For those in the working or lower class, their opportunities for exploration during the same period are likely greatly reduced. Côté and Bynner (2008) concurred by stating, "...exclusion

processes in education and the workplace prevent young people in some socio-economic contexts from experiencing the developmental processes presumed to be of benefit to all ‘emerging adults’” (p. 251).

Other age-bound stage theorists such as Erikson have also been criticized for not being inclusive of the diverse experiences of individuals based on their gender, social class, and ethnicity (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Bynner (2005) stated that stage theories forwarded by developmental psychologists “downplay structurally based variation around the norms” (p. 367) by focusing on specific age ranges and periods of transition rather than individual and group variation around mean values. While it is helpful to look at median trends around structural variables like age and social class, it is “the error variance that is crucial to our understanding of human development” (Hendry & Kloep, 2007, p. 76). Overall, scholars in opposition to age-based stage theories have argued for using a systematic perspective to find explanations of the processes and mechanisms that govern human change at any age (Bynner, 2005; Kloep & Hendry, 2011)

The second concern of emerging adulthood critics is that the concept does not add to the understanding of human development because it describes societal transformation for only a specific set of individuals rather than addressing the interactive processes and mechanisms involved in human development (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Specifically, Côté and Bynner (2008) remained “unconvinced” by the evidence of a new developmental phase in the life course that applies to all young people as they could not identify to what extent the concept provides explanatory power of the experiences of young people that would be

absent without the stage of emerging adulthood. In other words, what is the added value of emerging adulthood? Given this question, critics of emerging adulthood have called for social scientists to move away from age-bound stage theories toward more systemic approaches that:

consider human interaction within cultural, historical, and psychosocial shifts and the peculiarities of time and place and embrace dynamic, systemic, interactive models as a way of charting and understanding development across the adolescent– adult transition and, indeed, across the whole life span.

(Hendry & Kloep, 2007, p. 78)

Arnett and his colleagues (Arnett, 2006b, 2007; Arnett & Tanner, 2011; Tanner & Arnett, 2011) have engaged in an active debate in order to respond to emerging adulthood’s critiques. Responding to the merit of stage theories, Arnett (2006b) explained that this is a common disagreement between sociologists who emphasize structural factors as the basis of their frameworks whereas developmental psychologists view factors including personality, intelligence, and relationships with family and peers simultaneously with structural factors. For developmental psychologists, the developing person is considered an active agent in the environment while sociologists “view people as unwittingly subject to structural factors over which they have no control” (Arnett, 2006b, p. 115).

In relation to the key critique that emerging adulthood does not apply to all young people who are in their late teens through their twenties, Arnett (2006a) has contended emerging adults around the world share demographic similarities in that they are waiting until their late twenties to embrace stable adult roles and they share

developmental similarities of focusing on identity explorations. But rather than there being one emerging adulthood, Arnett believes that there are many emerging adulthoods in that young people's experiences are likely to vary by cultural context, educational attainment, and social class (Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, & Tanner, 2011). Both sides of the argument have acknowledged that these factors matter within the age period, but the real debate is as to how much? Arnett and his colleagues contend that culture, education, and social class are interesting and important within group variations, but the group still has enough similarities in common to be deemed distinct as emerging adults while critics hold that the experiences based on these factors are different enough that individuals cannot reasonably be said to belong to the same life stage (Arnett & Tanner, 2011). The following discussion outlines scholars' most recent efforts to address concerns regarding emerging adulthood in relation to social class and culture.

Emerging adulthood applicability across social class and culture.

Arnett and Tanner (2011) examined differences by social class in emerging adults and found that demographically, the primary difference between middle- and working-class emerging adults is their educational attainment. Emerging adults who begin their postsecondary education immediately after high school have the opportunity to live in "semiautonomy" with increased adult responsibilities and autonomy but not yet reaching the levels they will experience later in adulthood. This semiautonomy is emblematic of the in-between state of emerging adulthood. But for those emerging adults who go to work immediately after high school or combine work and postsecondary education, the experience is different. While these working

emerging adults may be developing job-specific skills and knowledge, their long-term earning potential is immediately impacted as since 1970 in the United States, the median income for people with 4-year college degrees has risen slowly and steadily whereas people with a high school degree or less have had median wages has dropped by over one-third (Arnett & Tanner, 2011).

Interestingly though, while demographic differences exist among emerging adults by social class, there are few differences in relation to social and psychological variables. Arnett (2003) presented criteria for adulthood to 500 Americans ages 21-29 years across four ethnic groups (African American, Latino, Asian American and White). The most important criteria for adulthood were the same across the social class backgrounds including accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Differences between social class did exist between some of the less-endorsed criteria for adulthood with those from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds being more likely to favor criteria related to interdependence, norm compliance, and family capacities as compared to those from higher SES backgrounds (Arnett, 2003). Additionally, emerging adults from low SES backgrounds were more likely to view themselves as having reached adulthood which may be related to the fact that more respondents from low SES backgrounds were already parents, a situation that often spurs young people to feel as if they are adults (Arnett & Tanner, 2011). Finally, the majority of respondents from low SES backgrounds believed their lives would be better than their parents with qualitative follow-up interviews revealing that the optimism stemmed from the low SES emerging adults believing they would receive more education than their parents

and therefore would exceed their parents' income and occupational success (Arnett, 2004). Overall, social class has not been a primary focus of the studies on emerging adulthood and Arnett and his colleagues have agreed that socio-economic factors that influence the likelihood that emerging adulthood is a normal, expected stage of human development need to be further investigated (Tanner & Arnett, 2009).

Similar to social class, "the study of cultural themes and variations in emerging adulthood is just beginning" (Tanner & Arnett, 2009, p. 43), but three investigations have revealed telling findings on this topic from the regions of Europe and Latin America. In Europe, Douglass (2007) examined fertility rates in 10 European countries (Sweden, Norway, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Latvia, and the Czech Republic) as low fertility is one of the most salient consequences of emerging adulthood. Additionally, Douglass examined the national and regional similarities and differences of emerging adulthood in Europe as compared to the United States. Results revealed that in the European countries examined, childbearing is beginning 10 years later than it did 50 years ago, and based on demographic analysis, this shift can be "attributed to the length of time now devoted to the tasks of emerging adulthood – completing education, leaving home, finding a job, experiencing the world, finding a partner, and securing a home. Childbearing for the young of the middle classes rarely precedes the completion of this process" (Douglass, 2007, p. 103).

While the delay of marriage and parenthood are similar aspects of emerging adulthood in Europe and the United states, some European variations on emerging adulthood do exist. Young people in northern Europe are provided economic

assistance while exploring education and job-related opportunities while in the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe, families provided this sort of assistance and support by allowing young people to remain at home until their early thirties. In France and Germany, educational systems are tied to employment structures so less career exploration is required which in turn means less economic instability. Finally, Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries have pushed for overt autonomy whereas in the rest of Europe, young people are happy to remain at home for extended periods. Overall, the analysis by Douglass provided cultural specificity in relation to emerging adulthood that is related yet still different to the experience of emerging adults in the United States.

In Latin America, data from diverse sources including the Population Reference Bureau report from 2005 was examined regarding secondary school enrollment, mean age at marriage, fertility rates, and percentage of people living below the poverty line for nine countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela (Galambos & Martinez, 2007). Based on this data, it appears that emerging adulthood has been observed to exist for some individuals in that they are free to pursue secondary education, engage in different lifestyle options, and delay marriage and parenthood. But it appears that in most of the countries examined, emerging adulthood is experienced by the middle class who live in more urban areas and reside in more developed countries rather than being a normative stage of development throughout the entire region.

An example of emerging adulthood in Latin America comes from a

longitudinal study in Argentina, one of the most economically developed countries in the region (Facio, Resett, Micocci, & Mistrorigo, 2007). Approximately 875 respondents attending the first years of high school in a mid-sized Argentinian city were surveyed periodically starting in their mid-teens through their late twenties and were asked if they viewed themselves as adults and the criteria they used to define what an adult is. Of those who were asked if they considered themselves to be an adult at ages 25-27, 46% responded yes they had reached adulthood while 45% answered “in some respects, yes, in some respects, no,” and 9% responded no which was in similar proportion to responses from similarly aged young people from the United States (Facio et al., 2007). Also similar to their U.S. peers, the Argentinian sample used individualistic criteria to explain what an adult is and perceived the stage they were in as a time for exploring a variety of possible life directions, a time of possibilities, and a time of considerable personal freedom. Differences in emerging adulthood in the United States and Argentina involved the Argentinians using collectivist criteria to describe what an adult is, regarding the emerging adulthood years as less unstable and more other-focused, and describing the time period as a time to remain at home rather than find a semiautonomous living arrangement (Facio et al., 2007). While the Argentinian experience for young people was relatively similar to emerging adults from the United States, Galambos and Martinez (2007) cautioned that:

For the many Latin American youth confronted with poverty, child marriage, and inadequate educational and occupational opportunities, emerging adulthood will probably unfold quite differently, if at all, even as they are

increasingly exposed to new expectations about role exploration and self-development in their transition to adulthood. (p. 109)

This section provided the critiques of emerging adulthood and addressed its applicability across social class and culture. Attempting to explain life span development in the modern world requires being attuned to ever-changing global forces, societal influences which may vary between countries and cultures.

“There are many new ‘adolescences’ forming around the world, refracted through distinct circumstances and cultural systems, and not a *single* global youth culture exists (Arnett et al., 2011, p. 6). Older theories on entry into stable, gender-specific adult roles around age 20 are no longer adequate to describe industrialized societies so emerging adulthood has been proposed as developmental period that takes into account the profound societal and economic changes of recent decades (Arnett et al., 2011)

Generational Views of Adulthood

Having completed a review of the adolescence- and adulthood-focused theories describing twentieth and twenty-first century conceptualizations of adulthood, explored the new developmental period of emerging adulthood which is positioned between adolescence and adulthood, and reviewed critiques of emerging adulthood, this discussion now turns to how generational status may influence student affairs professionals’ conceptualization of adulthood.

Generational status was important to this investigation because it implies that individuals from different generational cohorts hold a unique position that could

influence the way they perceive adulthood. Positionality refers to the way one stands in relation to ‘the other’ (Merriam et al., 2001). These positions are shifting and involve the factors of education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts. Positionalities are also possible when focusing on insider/outsider variations.

Feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988; 1991) contributed to the concept of positionality by discussing the usefulness of fixed, essentialized markers to delineate how one’s position influences the production of knowledge (Thorne, 2010). Haraway (1988) argued for “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (p. 589). Maps of consciousness are created through situated knowledge that reflects our locationality (historical, national, generational) and positionality (race, gender, class, nationality, sexuality) (Haraway, 1991). Through acknowledgement that where we are always affects our viewpoint, we recognize that our positionality is not indeed fixed but rather relational as the context that creates our reality is in constant motion and is the place from which our values are interpreted and constructed (Wolf, 1996).

Different generational cohorts share a common location that present common social problems requiring the generation to collectively create solutions and strategies to adapt to their environment (Burnett, 2010). “This process leads to the generation’s recognition of its own positionality and thus allows it to develop strategic responses, to become actualized as a strategic generation” (Burnett, 2010, p. 3). Therefore, since different generations have unique positionalities, it was conceivable that these

positionalities could influence the way student affairs professionals conceptualize adulthood and their perceptions of college students as adults.

This section examines and critiques theories regarding generations, reviews the general characteristics and distinguishing differences between the three generations that currently comprise the majority of all student affairs professionals, and presents the literature discussing generational differences in the workplace.

Theories of Generations

As briefly discussed in Chapter One, Strauss and Howe provided the most extensive contemporary articulation of a cohort or generational model (Coomes & DeBard, 2004), but the concept of a cohort generation is one that has been incorporated in the writings of philosophers and scientists like Auguste Comte and John Stuart for the past two hundred years (Rindfleisch, 1994). Despite the concept's longstanding history, it is one that has only been given cursory attention by the social sciences (Rindfleisch, 1994).

A generation is defined by demographers as a period of roughly 25 which provides the time for a newborn child to grow up, mature, and begin to produce offspring, but social scientists define generations in terms of critical events that mark a generation's beginning and end (Bennett & Craig, 1997). The length of time between these critical events cannot be predicted which makes some generations longer or shorter and, in some instances, the social scientists cannot reach a scholarly consensus on the critical events that are powerful enough to shape the collective identity of a group and mark the beginning or end of a generation (Bennett & Craig,

1997). The following discussion reviews most recent generational conceptualizations focusing on Karl Mannheim's idea of generational units and Strauss and Howe's generational model.

Karl Mannheim's generational units.

In the late 1920s, Mannheim (1928/1952) introduced the term "generational unit" (Bennett & Craig, 1997) to:

...describe a group of people born during the same period who at a relatively young age experienced some major event – for example, war, political upheaval, or economic catastrophe – that left them with a sense of having shared a common history and with feelings of kinship connecting them to others of approximately the same age. (p. 2)

Mannheim hypothesized that the major event would most strongly affect those who were coming of age at the time of the major event's occurrence assuming that they were old enough to comprehend the event yet young enough for it to make a very strong psychological impression. Social scientists widely agree that the coming of age period referred to by Mannheim occurs from adolescence through the early twenties (Rindfleisch, 1994).

While generations have the capacity to develop thinking responses that are similar because of their shared encounter with historical conditions, Mannheim believed that intra-generational perspective differences existed based on different variable such as social class, religion, gender, and language as these factors located different sections of the generation differently in the social structure and in relation to one another (Burnett, 2010). Bennett and Craig (1997) offered an example of intra-

generational perspective differences of the 1930's Great Depression having had a more devastating impact and thus longer-lasting impression on those from lower- and working-class families than those from well-to-do families. Although segments of a generation may "work up their social materials in different ways, developing different strategic responses" (Burnett, 2010, p. 35), one generation can still produce a "stratification of consciousness" within their generation. One generation's spectrum of understanding will be different than another generation's spectrum of understanding of the same social situation based on their different relationship to and experience of the event (Burnett, 2010).

The final critical component to Mannheim's generational concept is the role of consciousness. Consciousness is understood to be "in part a form of memory, where personally acquired memories arising from lived experience come to inform discussions and emergent social understanding of the present" (Burnett, 2010, p. 37). In our society, young people tend to be grouped together in peer groups through institutional structures such as schools, military service, neighborhoods, and certain work environments. Through these interactions, young adults share their individual recollections of a major historical event and as a group, produce a collective memory of the event (Rolger, 2002).

Scholars have continued to refine and discuss Mannheim's concept of generations (see Dou, Wang, and Zhou, 2006; Ingelhart, 1977; and Rolger, 2002) and multiple studies have offered evidence of Mannheim's argument for generations. The first two relate to the concept of generational memory. In 1992, Scott and Zac asked 600 British adults to identify the most important national or world events and changes

over the past 60 years (Burnett, 2010). World War II and events in Europe were cited the most as big events, but experiences that occurred during a respondent's formative years were most influential in determining which events that respondent would select as important. Gender and class were also examined in relation to how important respondents rated events but there were no differences in these variables.

The second study by Schuman and Rieger (1992) surveyed a cross-section of 1,100 United States citizens using random-digit dial telephone samples to explore the social reaction to the US bombing of Iraq in 1991. Respondents were presented two analogies and asked which they thought reflected the current situation: 1) Saddam Hussein of Iraq is like Adolf Hitler of Germany in the 1930s and it is important to stop him now or he will seize one country after another, and 2) Getting involved with Iraq in the Middle East is a lot like getting involved in Vietnam in the 1960s and a small commitment at first can lead to years of conflict without clear results.

The researchers' were interested in how the choice between historical analogies was related to generation as operationalized by age (Schuman & Rieger, 1992). The results indicated that the "old" cohorts (born from 1901-1945) preferred the World War II analogy while the "young" cohorts (born from 1946-1973) selected the Vietnam analogy. The researchers attributed the younger cohorts resonating with the Vietnam analogy to their adolescence occurring at the onset of the Vietnam War era. Schuman and Rieger (1992) determined that respondent agreement with the analogies represented how respondents analyzed the bombing of Iraq and their choices were strongly cohort bound. Interestingly though, correlations between cohort and ensuing support or opposition of the war were very weak. This indicated

that while analysis of the overall situation was cohort bound, the position of support or opposition was divided. These findings support Mannheim's argument that within the same generation, analysis of situations is often similar as the reference points set up in youth may prevail, but that action or decisions made on the analysis may differ within the generation as indicated in this study (Burnett, 2010).

Two additional studies focused on Chinese generational groups and highlight the transferability of this concept to different societies. Dou et al., (2006) used the generational approach to examine differences in preferences for media program types between one younger generation (Chinese Generation X) and three older generational cohorts (Red Generation, Pre-Cultural Revolution Generation, and Post-Cultural Revolution Generation) in mainland China. The Red Generation was born in proximity to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and grew up in a time of great economic hardship, valued self-sacrifice, and was raised as believers in communism, but experienced disillusionment after the Cultural Revolution which ended in 1976. The Pre-Cultural Revolution Generation was born between 1951 and 1964, experienced their formative years during the Cultural Revolution so were also disillusioned by the collapse of communist ideals and is cautious of social perspectives. The Post-Cultural Revolution Generation was born from 1965-1973 so their teenage years were during China's economic reform years so they are more attuned to consumerism, take pride in individual accomplishments and are more individual-focused than previous generations. Finally, Chinese Generation X, born from 1974-1984, came of age during the Chinese economic reform so saw the market economy develop quickly resulting in more educational and personal development

opportunities and thus more opportunities to attend college. This generation was consistently exposed to Western popular culture, display more self-indulgent behaviors and attitudes, and are more materialistic than previous generations.

In order to compare previous Chinese generations to Chinese Generation X to determine if Generation X consumers have less or greater preference for information-based media programs and if there are generational differences based on living in more or less developed regions, the researchers (Dou et al., 2006) obtained a random sample of 5,200 of the 48,000 respondents to the China National Readership Survey (CNRS) which is conducted annually and focuses on urban consumers' media and consumption habits. Through the use of binary logit models, their analysis revealed that Generation X consumers, as compared to the older generations, preferred entertainment-based media programming over information-based programming. Effects on preferences for media program types were less pronounced in more developed regions, so Generation X consumers living in more developed cities paid more attention to information-based programs and showed less preference for entertainment-based content as compared to their peers who lived in less developed cities. Overall, the investigation provided support for the concept of generations and illustrates the concept's consideration that although generations emphasize the shared experiences of social groups, heterogeneity is also allowable within each cohort (Griffin, 2004).

The second study based on the Chinese culture examined if the personal values of the Chinese changed over the generations given the major changes in the recent Chinese social and economic history (Egri & Ralson, 2004). Additionally, the

study looked to see if changes in Chinese values corresponded to generational periods in the United States and if personal values had converged or diverged between China and the United States as a result of recent Chinese corporate modernization. The researchers utilized Strauss and Howe's (1991) U.S. generational classifications of Silent Generation, Baby Boomer, and Generation X (which will be discussed further in the next section) and the four comparable Chinese generations of Republican, Consolidation, Cultural Revolution, and Social Reform which based on the authors; descriptions are the same groups as described in the Dou et al. (2006) study above (Red Generation, Pre-Cultural Revolution Generation, and Post-Cultural Revolution Generation, and Chinese Generation X respectively) but simply with different generational titles.

Participants in Egri and Ralson's (2004) study were 774 Chinese and 1,004 U.S. managers and professionals surveyed in 1995 and all completed the Schwartz Values Survey and 45 of the items that had cross-culturally equivalent meanings were retained to measure 10 universal personal values. Multivariate analyses of covariance (MANCOVA) and post hoc group comparisons were used in analysis and the results revealed that the three Chinese generations (Consolidation, Cultural Revolution, Social Reform) since the establishment of Communist China were significantly more open to change and self-enhancement but less conservative and self-transcendent than the Republican Era generation. The value orientations of the three U.S. generations were similar to the corresponding Chinese patterns except for the valuing of self-transcendence. Finally, the more entrepreneurial value orientations of the most recent Chinese generations were consistent with the current Chinese corporate

modernization. Overall, the “primary finding of this study was the importance of generation cohort and life stage in ascertaining the personal value orientations of managers and professionals” (Egri & Ralson, 2004, p. 218).

Overall, Mannheim’s (1952) framework of generational units outlined generations as youth-based movements that form when they enter society and encounter social problems that current social scripts do not allow them to address. As a group, a generation moves away from old social structures, engages in new opportunities, and develops collective responses that allow their generation new social understandings and a sense of their generation as a historical agent (Burnett, 2010). While each generation is distinct from one another, Mannheim believed that socio-demographic factors including social class and region create internal differentiation within generational units which in turn might create differing social responses within a generation. “Mannheim saw generations as bearing both reflexivity and social tasks, and in this sense he created a modern twentieth century concept of generations” (Burnett, 2010, p. 39).

Strauss and Howe’s generational model.

As previously discussed in Chapter One, Strauss and Howe provided the most extensive articulation of a generational model and it has served as the conceptual framework for examining generations of college students (Coomes & De Bard, 2004). Strauss and Howe’s (1991) definition of a generation contained two components. The first is that a generation is a cohort whose length approximates a span of one of the four phases of life (elderhood, midlife, rising adulthood, and youth) and whose boundaries are fixed by a peer personality. A peer personality as “generational

persona recognized and determined by (1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behavior; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 64).

When members of one generation interact with the members of another generation, the recognition of their distinctive generational differences occurs. Additionally, the varying way in which different generations experience “social moments” or historical events radically alter their social environment (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). The interactions between generations and experience of social moments results in the “generational diagonal” which “acknowledges that generations are not static; they move through time influencing and being influenced by important historical events (events Strauss and Howe see as inner-oriented ‘spiritual awakenings’ and out-oriented ‘secular crises’) and other generations” (Coomes & DeBard, p.8).

Strauss and Howe (1991) also posited that successive generations fall into alternating rhythms of dominant and recessive generations. A generation is labeled as dominant when members experience a secular crisis of a social movement as they are entering rising adulthood and elderhood. Conversely, a recessive generation experiences a secular crisis of a social movement as they enter youth and midlife so the event does not have as large of an impact on the generation. Since dominant and recessive generations alternate one after the other, “every generation has a unique phase-of-life position before and after each type of social movement, a unique set of generational neighbors, and...a unique combination of parents and children. Consequently, each of the...generations develops its own unique type of peer

personality” (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 73).

The final aspect of Strauss and Howe’s generational conceptualization involved the “manner in which the dynamics of diagonal movement result in a cycle of generational types that are recurrent in nature” (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 10). Strauss and Howe (1991) outline four generational types: idealist, reactive, civic, and adaptive. An idealist generation is inwardly focused but dominant group whose childhood years occur after a secular crisis. These young people are indulged in their early years, come of age inspiring a spiritual awakening, are somewhat narcissistic young adults, encourage principles as moralistic midlifers, and become visionary elders preparing the following generations for the next secular crisis (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

A reactive generation is recessive, growing up during a spiritual awakening being criticized and underprotected by prior generations. As it matures, this generation engages in risk-taking as young adults feel somewhat alienated. In midlife, this group morphs into pragmatic leaders during a secular crisis and as elders, remain respected but less influential as they are more reclusive in their old age (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

A civic generation is a dominant group that is outwardly focused having grown up in increasingly protected environments after a spiritual wakening. The group comes of age overcoming a secular crisis, and as young adults, are high-achievers and heroic. During midlife, this powerful generation continues being high-achievers resulting in the creation of institutions, and in their elder years, remains busy in anticipation of the next spiritual awakening (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The fourth and final generational type is the adaptive generation, a recessive group that grows up overprotected and somewhat suffocated youths during a secular crisis. They mature to be risk-averse and conformist young adults which lead to indecisive midlifers who operate as arbitrator-leaders during a spiritual awakening. Finally, they are sensitive elders who maintain influence but are less respected than prior generation's elders (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The four peer personalities traverse a diagonal line of life stages that are inundated with the influences of other generation peer personalities and social movements. The cycle of four peer personalities then repeats in the same fixed sequence which forces the age patterns of each life phase to layer themselves from one era to the next. This results in a predictable pattern which Strauss and Howe (1991) term a generational constellation.

In summation of their conceptualization of generations, Strauss and Howe (1991) emphasized that the generational cycle is deterministic only in the broadest sense as it does not predict positive or negative outcomes for the generation. Every generation has its flaws and every "constellation mood" has potential downfalls. Generational cycles provide each generation with a location in history, a peer personality, and a set of possible scripts to follow, but the cycles still allow space for those in the generation to express both good and bad instincts and "to choose a script that posterity may later read with gratitude or sorrow" (Strauss & Howe, 1991, p. 78)

Critiques of and Cautions with Generational Conceptualizations

While generational conceptualizations assist in explaining the intricate

relationships between historical events and individual behavior that produce lasting orientations among those born within the same time period (Rolger, 2002), this set of theories is not without its critics. The work of Howe and Strauss (1993, 2000, 2003; Strauss & Howe, 1991) has been critiqued most directly given its recency and popularity in the public press with two aspects being most frequently questioned. The first concern is the rigor with which the evidence was collected to support the conceptual assertions. Brooks (2000) stated, “The theory is not good in the aspect of rigorously sifting through evidence and supporting assertions with data...Most of the evidence Howe and Strauss provide is fuzzy, as zeitgeist measurements tend to be” (p. 415).

As generational theory examines numerous historical periods simultaneously, data collection becomes challenging which leads to the second major critique that the concept is stereotyping and creating overgeneralizations (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Fogarty, 2008; Hoover 2007, 2009; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). One critic indicated that to accept generational thinking, one must believe two large assumptions - that millions of people born in the same 20-year age bracket are fundamentally different from people of other age groups and those millions of people are similar to each other in meaningful ways – the turn of a sharp “historical corner” that the critic had difficulty accepting (Hoover, 2009).

Hoover (2009) stated that, “several researchers have blasted this theory of ‘nonlinear’ social change” (§ 35). The Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the University of California at Los Angeles has conducted an annual survey of college freshmen since 1966 thus providing a longitudinal view of trends. Their

recent report, “American Freshmen: Forty Year Trends” (Higher Education Research Institute, 2008), provided evidence that runs counter to the characteristics that Howe and Strauss (2003) put forth regarding Millennial students indicating that today’s students are not significantly busier, more confident, or more positive than recent decades. Additionally, Hoover (2009) cited competing narratives that were circulating in the education and public health fields in which young people are more anxious, depressed, self-centered, and demanding than the Millennial profile allows for.

Another aspect of the stereotyping and overgeneralization argument stems from the fact that the generational assumptions posited by Howe and Strauss (2003) are based largely on the “characteristics of affluent, White young adults so institutions need to exercise caution when making admission and marketing policies that rely heavily on ‘superficial definitions’ of who Millennials are, what they are like, and what they want from college” (Hoover, 2007, ¶4). Additionally, their observations have missed large pockets of young people whose life experiences and struggles have been much different than those their generational conceptualization is based on (Hoover, 2009).

While it is important to consider the critiques of any theory, Coomes and DeBard (2004) pointed out that generational analysis must be considered like measures of central tendency. It helps to highlight the characteristics of a group but is not adequate to describe the characteristics of individuals or even the dynamics of subcultures (i.e., students of color, LGBT students, ethnic and cultural groups). “The lesson learned from other social science perspectives – that the variance within

groups is always greater than the variance between groups – undoubtedly applies to generations as well” (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 14).

Bearing this in mind, Bennett and Craig (1997) pointed out some potential “hazards” associated with generational analysis for those who are still interested in pursuing this line of inquiry. First, they cautioned that scholars studying the dynamics of generational change “must take care not to assume that all persons of a similar age - even those who have lived through some sort of major social or political transformation – will have the same outlook, much less that they will share a common psychological identity as a result of their experiences” (p. 6). Additionally, some critical events are powerful enough to shape the views of virtually all citizens within a particular society regardless of age (e.g., in the United States, the Civil War in the 1860s and the Great Depression in the 1930s; in China, the Chinese Revolution of the 1940s). These critical events are called period effects as they impact every group within the population in a similar way irrespective of age. An additional caution is offered though in that while period effects might affect citizens of all ages, they still exert the strongest impact on the young.

Another delineation that Bennett and Craig (1997) outlined was distinguishing between generational and life-cycle effects. Life-cycle effects refer to the movement through the life stages of birth, childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle age, old age, and death, a progression that encompasses biological, psychological, and social elements. Regardless of when an individual is born and his or her location in the social structure, the majority of people encounter similar issues at similar points in their lives including obtaining a formal education, pursuing employment, negotiating

relationships, raising children, and retiring. “As people age, they change, and these changes are essentially the same for almost everyone” (Bennett & Craig, 1997, p. 7) and by middle age become relatively set in their ways and more resistant new ideas, values, and lifestyles. When conducting research on generations, this implies that researchers need to consider that age-based differences found in cross-sectional data could be due to life-cycle factors rather than generational change. Overall, Bennett and Craig (1997) concluded that it is challenging under even the best of circumstances to delineate the effects of generation, period in time, and place in the life cycle as they are all so closely interrelated thus making it difficult for a researcher to ever be completely sure of the source of observed differences in outlook or behavior between the old and the young.

Despite the critiques and cautions associated with the conception of generations, even the critics ceded that the notion of generations “illuminates changes that really do seem to be taking place” (Brooks, 2000, p. 415). Conceptual models are not infallible and should be offered up for critique as in this discussion. This author has elected to follow the line of thinking presented by Coomes and DeBard (2004) which considers generational perspective to be an additional tool to understand student affairs professionals and the students with whom they work:

By exploring the factors that shape a generation’s peer personality and discerning identifying characteristics of that personality, educators can develop more effective policies and practices. Effective practitioners must have a firm grasp of theoretical and conceptual models that explain their work....Understanding the theory of generations gives the practitioner a

supplemental source of insight to round out conceptual frameworks he or she already holds and relies on. (p. 13)

Generational Classifications of Student Affairs Professionals

Having reviewed the various conceptualizations of generations as well as critiques and cautions associated with its use, the discussion turns to the three generations that currently comprise the U.S. workforce. The traits and characteristics of the Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers introduced in Chapter One will be expanded upon as these three generations represent both current college students and those currently at work as student affairs professionals in institutions of higher education across the United States.

Millennials.

The Millennials are the generational cohort born between 1982 and 2002 that comprises the traditional students who are currently on college campuses as well as many entry-level student affairs professionals and graduate students in professional preparation programs. Current college students and new student affairs professionals represent only half of the Millennial generation though as Millennials born between 1994 and 2002 are still in grade school, middle school, and high school. Often thought of as the “Babies on Board” generation in reference to the car signs that appeared simultaneously with this cohort, this group is “more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4; Pew Research Center, 2010) than any other youth generation in living memory. Based on population projections, the Millennials will likely top 100 million members,

three times larger than the two generations proceeding them (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

Seven core traits have come to define the peer personality of the Millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Millennials have been made to feel special; society has reframed issues in terms of how children will be impacted making Millennials feel as if their problems and future are those of the nation. Millennials have been sheltered; increased rules for their protection and surrounded by child-safety devices, they experience adult protectiveness in ways quite opposite than that of their parents. Despite events like 9/11, Millennials feel confident as they hold high levels of trust and optimism and perceive the future as a bright one for themselves and their peers. Millennials are team-oriented having been raised working in groups, playing organized sports, and participating in cooperative activities like volunteer service. Considered conventional, Millennials adhere to rules and are more likely to accept their parents' values. Millennials are pressured in that they are "pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them" (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 52). Finally, achieving is the last core trait of this cohort in that they have been raised with increasingly demanding school standards and long-term plans to achieve education and career goals.

In addition to the core traits held by Millennials, Raines (2003) identified eight key trends in society have impacted the lives of this generation. First, a positive societal shift in attitudes about children has turned American focus back on to children and their families. Whether families are intact or divorced, parents are making life new work-life choices that allow them more flexible hours, working from

home or taking children along on business trips so as to be more involved in the lives of their children (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The second trend impacting Millennials are scheduled and structured lives. Shuffled from activity to activity, this generation enjoyed very little unstructured time and is used to their parents and teachers planning their schedules in great detail. Multiculturalism is another trend that has influenced the Millennials as they have had more daily interaction with other ethnicities and cultures than any other generation. In fact on today's college campuses, Hispanics are the fastest growing enrollment group and African Americans enrollment has more than doubled since 1980 (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Related to multiculturalism is the increased globalism that Millennials have experienced through technology and media's ability to easily connect people around the world (Raines, 2003). Terrorism, heroism, and patriotism connected with 9/11 and other profound events in the formative years of Millennials are three further trends that have influenced the context of how these students see the world. Finally, parent advocacy has had a significant impact on this generation in that parents have been active, involved and quick to intercede in an effort to ensure their children will grow up safely and be treated well (Raines, 2003).

A recent report released by the Pew Research Center (2010) validates the distinctive Millennial generation characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors outlined over the past ten years. Their report was based on a new survey of a national cross-section of 2,020 adults that included an oversample of Millennials. The report also looked to two decades of Pew Research Center surveys and analysis of Census Bureau data. The highlights of the report indicate reveal that the personality of the

Millennial cohort is confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat, and open to change. Due to the economic challenges facing the country, many are experiencing difficulty finding jobs. Currently 37% of 18- to 29-year-olds are unemployed or out of the work force (Pew Research Center, 2010). To combat unemployment, many Millennials have elected to enhance their educations with millions of 20-somethings enrolling in graduate school and 39.6% of 18 to 24 year olds enrolling in college as of 2008. The Millennials get along well with their parents and indicate that they had less spats with their parents during the teenage years than their own parents when they were growing up. Additionally, the economic situation has resulted in one in eight Millennials aged 22 and older indicating that they have “boomeranged” back to a parent’s home to live (Pew Research Center, 2010). The Millennial generation’s technical savvy is unparalleled from multiple perspectives in the numbers of gadgets they use on a regular basis to their connectivity via wireless technology, online social networking, playing video games online, and posting self-created videos online. They are more likely than older adults to say technology makes life easier and brings family and friends closer together (Pew Research Center, 2010). Millennials are more racially tolerant than their elders and are much more accepting of nontraditional family arrangements. Finally, 41% of Millennials indicate they are satisfied with the way things are going in the country as compared to 26% of those ages 30 and older (Pew Research Center, 2010). Overall, the Millennials are a group with a positive outlook on their future and they strive to get along well with others, especially their elders, a characteristic that will be explored further in this chapter when examining Millennials in the workplace.

Generation X.

Generation X (also referred to as Thirteeners) were born from 1961-1981 and their formative years were the late 1970s through the early 1990s (Strauss & Howe, 1991). This generation likely includes a small portion of undergraduate students, most mid-level student affairs professionals, and some senior student affairs professionals. Members of Generation X consider themselves to be “the generation after. Born after 1960, after you, after it all happened. After Boomers. And before the Babies-on-Board of the 1980s, those cuddly tykes deemed too cute and fragile to be left *Home Alone*” (Howe & Strauss, 1993, p. 7). From an early age, this generation received markedly different treatment from parents and other adults than that of the Millennials and Baby Boomers. This group “survived a hurried childhood of divorce, latchkeys, open classrooms, devil-child movies, and a shift from G to R ratings” (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 137). Generation X is considered the “least wanted” of twentieth-century American baby generations as it became en vogue for parents to focus on their own careers and personal happiness rather than focusing more of their energy on their children. During Generation X’s youth, the divorce risk was twice that of the Baby Boomers and as a direct result, Generation X experienced much more complex family structures with just over half of Generation X children living with two once-married parents (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Additionally, Strauss and Howe (1991) discuss how Generation X youth were provided with very clear media images of parents as understanding pals who never got very angry and who often foundered as much as their children. This image was purposeful as parents of Generation X admitted to being imperfect and wanting to provide their children with

a more realistic life picture.

This introduction to the real world resulted in Generation X feeling as if adults were neither powerful nor virtuous and not in control of their own lives or the larger world. Coupling Generation X's parents working more with the parents' greater emphasis on exposing their Generation X children to what it was really like in the real world, many Generation X individuals believe they raised themselves and did not grow up as part of a family team hoping to join an adult team. Instead, they were "free agents looking forward to dealing and maneuvering their way through life's endless options. In their childhood memory, the individual always trumped the group" (Strauss & Howe, 1997, p. 198).

The changing role of parents in their lives was not the only difference encountered by Generation X youth as compared to the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations. Older generations perceived Generation X youth as less educated. In 1983, the report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education) was released by the U.S. Department of Education which warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in American schools. The report also stated that, "Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents" (¶14). Additional reports and writings during the 1980s sent the same message about Generation X in that they were receiving an inferior education, had inferior abilities, and this was not the fault of the adults around them but rather the Generation Xers were the ones lacking (Howe & Strauss, 1993; Strauss & Howe,

1991).

Strauss and Howe (1991) discussed a sampling of teachers who, having instructed Baby Boomers in the 1960s and Generation Xers in the mid-1980s, were asked to compare the two groups. The teachers indicated the Boomers were higher in all academic skills, communication abilities, and commitment to learning but Generation X excelled in negotiating skills, consumer awareness, adult-interaction skills, and defenses to prevent extreme dependency on parents or authorities. These qualities reflect one of the other distinguishing qualities of Generation X in that when it comes to employment, rather than being loyal to a single job, members of this generation often prefer risk and free agency (Strauss & Howe, 1997). They intend to build a portable career and admire those who create enterprise (DeBard, 2004).

At present, Generation X is between the ages of approximately 30 to 45 and is having children, many of whom are already in college. While Generation Xers were expected to grow up quickly while being independent, resourceful, and competitive all at an early age, Howe and Strauss (1993) predicted that Generation X will reinvigorate the notion of the American family by working to shield their marriages from the stress of their work lives; being very protective and nurturing in order to shield their children from life's harsher realities; and being more restrictive so their children do not take the same liberties that they took at their children's age.

Baby Boomers.

The Baby Boomer generation was born 1943-1960 and is distinguished by the dramatic increase in birth rates following World War II. This generation would likely include some mid-level student affairs professionals and most of the senior student

affairs staff. Their formative years occurred from 1953-1978, a time of post-war optimism that inspired a sense of stability, opportunity, and prosperity. The rise of the middle class way of life and the happy, easy environment turned individual's attention from the outer world which was looking fine, to the inner world which became the point of youth focus (Strauss & Howe, 1991). As a generational cohort, the Baby Boomers grew up as indulged youth, declared opposition to the lifestyle of their parents, demanded inner visions and self-perfection (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

Baby Boomers heading to college as traditional students did so between 1961 and 1982 which coincided with the conscious awakening social movements including the civil rights and women's movements and the Vietnam War. Thus, these individuals experienced significant collegiate unrest, when "social order seemed to be disintegrating" (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 11) as the country struggled with differing views on politics, war and social justice. In response, they loudly proclaimed their distaste for the secular aspects of their elders' lives – institutions, civic participation, and team playing (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Boomers instead sought deeper meaning in their lives.

When Baby Boomers were in college, there was "an unspoken code" that Baby Boomer's parents would be interested and committed to their education as evidenced through financial support, but everything else was under the Baby Boomer's per view (Jackson & Murphy, 2005). Ironically when Baby Boomers became parents themselves, they developed very close relationships with their children. As parents, Boomers are often described as protective and extremely concerned with the safety of their of their sons and daughters, involved in wanting to

help their children achieve, concerned in making sure their children receive “their fair share,” intelligent in that many are highly educated individuals themselves, and demanding as savvy customers used to being accommodated and getting what they want (Shotick & Galsky, 2006).

In general, Baby Boomers became more conservative in their 30’s and 40’s. In the 1970’s, Boomer women challenged the workplace glass ceiling and men and women alike began to flock to the fields of teaching, religion, journalism, law, marketing, and the arts (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Job status and social standing became more important in the 1980’s and the young urban professional or “yuppie” connotations of self-immersion, an impatient desire for personal satisfaction, and weak civic instincts fit many in the Boomer cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991). By the 1990’s, “they trumpeted a ‘culture war,’ touted a divisive ‘politics of meaning,’ and waged scorched-earth political battles between ‘red’ and ‘blue’ zones” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 45).

The conceptualization of generations and generational cohorts (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Mannheim, 1951; Strauss & Howe, 1991) has been used to better understand the characteristics and interactions of key higher education constituents: students and parents (Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Wartman & Savage, 2008). It was reasonable then to utilize the conceptualization to distinguish between segments of student affairs professionals considering that the population is also a key constituent group in higher education that spans three generational cohorts: Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers. The review of the literature now examines student affairs professionals as a population to distinguish between

characteristics professionals' hold as members of a particular generational cohort versus commonly held skills and abilities required to be successful within the profession of student affairs.

Generational characteristics within the workplace.

As previously noted in this chapter, generational status was important to this investigation because it implies that individuals from different generational cohorts hold a unique position that could influence the way they perceive of adulthood. Unfortunately, the literature review for this study did not reveal any empirical or theoretical information on generational differences in student affairs professionals' perceptions of the traditional college student population. Literature did exist though as to generational characteristics in the workplace. As student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood are influenced by the traditional college students they engage within the work environment context, a brief review of the literature on how Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials perceive of one another in the workplace was warranted.

Morukian (2009) stated that "nowhere is the generation gap more apparent than in institutions of higher education, where students and recent graduates often work beside career staff and faculty who have devoted decades to the institutions" (p. 10). Mills (2009) and Morukian (2009) both discussed specific generational workplace characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials including their general level of trust in relation to authority, preferred rewards, evaluation preference, type of initiative they most admire, leadership style, method of work performance feedback, type of work ethic, work-related loyalty, attitude toward work,

*Table 1
Generation Workplace Characteristics**

	Baby Boomer 1943-1960	Generation X 1961-1981	Millennials 1982-2002
Level of trust	Confident of self, not authority	Low toward authority	High toward authority
Rewards	Title and the corner office	Freedom not to do	Meaningful work
Evaluation	Once a year with documentation	“Sorry, but how am I doing?”	Feedback whenever I want it
Most admire	Taking charge	Creating enterprise	Following a hero of integrity
Leadership Style	Consensus seeking	Competence based	Team; everyone pulls together
Feedback Desired	Annually, much documentation	Will ask how they are doing	Instant feedback requested
Work Ethic	Work hard, play hard; worry about money	Work hard if it doesn't interfere with play	Work should be fun; let others pay
Loyalty	To work	To self	Resume always ready
Attitude Toward Work	Is it meaningful?	Pays the bills	Is it fun?
Values	Personal growth/health/wealth Work hard and be noticed Looking for personal path Individualistic Optimistic Team-oriented Work-driven	Life balance Think globally Self-reliant Diverse Informal Technologically literate Pragmatic	Cross-cultural, multi-tasking Emphasis on doing/achieving Sense of entitlement Team oriented Optimistic Civic-minded Confident Techno-advanced Sociable Most diverse Open minded

*Adapted from Mills, 2009, p. 363; Morukian, 2009, p. 10 and their personal values in relation to work. Each of these characteristics is outlined in Table 1. There are stark contrasts in the characteristics of the different generations

indicating that Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials have very unique

generational values, attitudes, and work ethic (Mills, 2009) that can influence the way that colleagues try to relate to one another.

From a broad perspective, Baby Boomers are currently the oldest generation working on college campuses. Some have reached traditional retirement age, but as this occurs, many have elected to continue working. Howe and Strauss (2007) surmised that traditional retirement will likely not provide enough mental stimulation for Baby Boomers, so many will either pursue new careers later in life, become consultants, or remain in high-prestige, but low-paying (or unpaid) emeritus positions. Baby Boomers who are not yet contemplating retirement are often driven, service-oriented team players who tend toward being workaholics and do not want to be micromanaged. Ironically despite having respect for Baby Boomers vision and values (Howe & Strauss, 2007), Generation Xers perceive Baby Boomers to be micromanagers and some Millennials think Boomers are uptight (Junco & Mastrondicasa, 2007) and insufficiently plugged in (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

In the workplace, Generation X is currently reaching midlife. Other generations view them as as tough, gritty, practical, independent, self-reliant, and unimpressed by authority (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Junco & Mastrondicasa, 2007). Due to the risks taken in their youth, Generation Xers seek more security in family and job and act as steady anchors of the community (Howe & Strauss, 2007). In their managerial capacities, members of Generation X will push for efficiency and innovation and will be willing to make quick decisions. Additionally, they are willing to streamline middle ranks, downsize bureaucracy as they value decentralized and flat organizations, and are willing create, dissolve, or reorganize overnight (Howe &

Strauss, 2007). In relation to their organization, Generation Xers are much more willing to be free agents and are ready to better their employment options by negotiating their own deals, seeking financial incentives, and switching employers quickly if a good offer comes along (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Junco & Mastronicasa, 2007). Baby Boomers who are experiencing conflict in the workplace with Generation Xers consider this group to be slackers while Millennials believe Generation Xers are indulged, self-absorbed, and naïve (Junco & Mastronicasa, 2007).

The Millennials are currently the young adults in the workplace both as entry-level professionals and as traditionally-aged students. From the perspective of some of their elders, Millennials appear to be doing an excellent job while others misinterpret their confidence as self-centeredness. This perception is disconcerting to some Millennials as they are accustomed to meeting and beating adult expectations (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Junco & Mastronicasa, 2007). Millennials appreciate being part of communities based on rules, standards, personal responsibility; are upbeat and team-oriented in the workplace; and, while tech-savvy, have social network standards that allow for a very wide range of acceptable online attitudes and behaviors (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

As young professionals, Millennials encounter challenges due to entry-level salaries remaining low, but having school debt and high cost of living expenses to contend with. Finally, insecurity in the job market and globalization is at times difficult for the sheltered Millennial generation “whom expect that all their careful preparation would guarantee them a comfortable future” (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p.

50), but Millennials remain confident that in the future, they will earn the levels of money they need to be secure and comfortable (Pew Research Center, 2010).

In the workplace, Millennials appear confident, trusting, and more teachable than their Boomer and Generation X counterparts who Millennials want to treat like partners rather than rivals. Boomers and Generation Xers, however, at times view their young colleagues as pampered, risk averse, and dependent (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Junco & Mastrondicasa, 2007). Supervisors, particularly Boomer supervisors, often find it difficult to adjust to constant feedback that Millennials desire (Junco & Mastrondicasa, 2007) and become frustrated with some Millennials' weakness in basic job skills such as punctuality and proper dress. But, when given clear goals and are allowed to work in groups, Millennials function quite well as this group excels at cooperation and organization rather than taking out-of-the-box initiatives (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Finally, when workplace issues arise, Millennials prefer to wait them out by letting those in charge solve the issue.

While the previous discussion outlined areas for potential conflict in the workplace between the generations and that Baby Boomers, Generation Xer, and Millennials share little common ground, great benefits arise from diverse work teams. Different generational groups can be encouraged to learn about one another to discover generational strengths that can serve as great assets to the organization and to focus on commonalities shared by all the generations including a common vision and goals for their work (Morukian, 2009). "More than a few organizations are tapping into the positive potential of their generationally diverse workforces. They are harnessing the power in the convergence of diverse viewpoints, passions, and

inspirations” (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000, p. 153).

This section discussed theories on generations and also provided critiques and cautions associated with this body of literature. General characteristics and distinguishing differences between the three generations that currently comprise the majority of all student affairs professionals - Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, were discussed and finally generational differences in the workplace were outlined.

Overall, generational literature has been employed in the higher education context to highlight and understand distinctive generational characteristics of college students (Coomes & DeBard, 2004) and to better understand the actions and interactions of students’ parents as they are important higher education constituents (Wartman & Savage, 2008). It was reasonable then for this investigation to use this theory base to distinguish between segments of the population of student affairs professionals considering that these professionals span three generational cohorts.

Final Summary of the Literature

The literature covered in this review represented key theoretical and empirical contributions that directly influence the understanding of student affairs professionals’ conceptualization of adulthood. For much of the twentieth century, Western society has held a “traditional” conceptualization of adulthood that involved completing school, leaving the parental home, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children (Hogan & Astone, 1986; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2005). Present day society maintains the traditional view that

adulthood is achieved when young people are in their early twenties and our higher education system's policies and practices reinforce this view, but human development scholars have tracked economic and social changes that indicate the process of becoming a full-fledged adult is now a more gradual process (Settersten & Ray, 2010). Based on these demographic, economic and societal shifts within American society, Jeffery Arnett (1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006a) has proposed a new period in the lifespan called emerging adulthood.

Literature was reviewed regarding how human development theory has traditionally emphasized psychological separation from family and the development of autonomy and individuation as central tasks of late adolescence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kenny, 1994; Schultheiss & Blustein, 1994). Once these tasks are completed, adulthood is achieved yet comprehensive adult development theories are somewhat limited and those that do exist have only been minimally developed (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 1981; Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989; Levinson, 1986). Arnett (2006) offered emerging adulthood as a new developmental period in which today's youth move from adolescence in their late teen years into emerging adulthood throughout their early to mid-twenties and then into adulthood only in their mid- to late-twenties (Arnett, 2006a). This new phase in the lifespan has been attributed to demographic and societal shifts that have extended the time period (from roughly ages 18-25) in which young people feel in-between in that they are neither adolescent nor adult and are still inextricably linked to family relationships (Aquilino, 2006; Arnett, 2006a). Subsequent studies based on the concept of emerging adulthood (Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) have revealed that

both traditional college students and their parents alike believe that the students are not yet adults during the college years.

Student affairs professionals have traditionally held to the notion of traditional college students being adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008), which is contradictory to Arnett's (2006a) notion of emerging adulthood. In examining student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood utilizing the conceptualization of emerging adulthood, generational status was also considered because it implies that individuals from different generational cohorts hold a unique position that could influence the way they perceive of adulthood. Conceptualizations of generations were reviewed including Mannheim's (1928/1952) generational units and Struass and Howe's (1991) generational model with an in-depth review of the traits and characteristics of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations. These three generations were of particular interest as they encompass the student affairs professionals currently working at American college and university campuses.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter presents the methods used in the study. It opens with a statement of the research questions examined in this study. Elements of the research design are discussed, including the study's sample, the survey instrument, and data collections procedures. Finally, the data analysis procedures are described.

Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood via the concept's five subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity. The study was exploratory as the population of student affairs professionals have not been examined in relation to this theoretical concept.

The six research questions that guided this investigation included:

1. What criteria do student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses (i.e., Baby Boomers born from 1943 and 1960, Generation X born from 1961-1981, and Millennials born from 1982-2002) consider important to achieve adulthood? Does the importance of these criteria differ if analyzed using age as a continuous variable rather than being grouped into generational statuses?
2. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of role transitions in their conceptualization of adulthood?
3. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of

norm compliance in their conceptualization of adulthood?

4. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of biological/age-related factors in their conceptualization of adulthood?
5. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of family capacities in their conceptualization of adulthood?
6. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of relational maturity in their conceptualization of adulthood?

Research Design

This quantitative survey study utilized a causal comparative design to explore the stated research questions with the independent variable being student affairs professionals' generational status - Baby Boomer, Generation X, or Millennial. These three categories were constructed based on age. Student affairs professionals born between 1943 and 1960 were classified as Baby Boomers, those born from 1961-1981 became part of Generation X, and Millennials were those born from 1982-2002 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The dependent variables were the respondent's mean scores of the items within the five subscales in the conceptual model on adulthood (role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity respectively). A causal comparative design was appropriate for this investigation since the data was gathered from preformed groups and the independent variable was not manipulated as is the case in an experiment (Krathwohl, 2004). The next sections provide an overview of the design including sampling strategy, instrumentation, and data collection.

Sample

To construct a sample of student affairs professionals, a stratified random sample was drawn from the membership directories of the two associations that serve as the primary professional associations serving student affairs administrators, faculty, and graduate and undergraduate students: NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA – College Student Educators International. NASPA has a membership of over 11,000 at 1,400 campuses and representing 29 countries, but only those professionals whose institutions were within the United States and were designated with membership classifications of “professional affiliate”, “faculty affiliate”, “graduate student affiliate”, and emeritus affiliate” were included in the population from which the final sample was drawn. ACPA has a membership of 8,500 members representing 1,500 private and public institutions from across the U.S. and around the world as well as organizations and companies that are engaged in the campus marketplace. Similar to NASPA, only ACPA members who had designated themselves as “entry level”, “mid-level”, and “senior” professionals were included in the population from which the final sample was drawn. It should be noted that both organizations are comprised of higher education administrators who self-identify as student affairs professionals and have the institutional or personal funding sources to maintain membership in one or both of the organizations. Therefore, this group may not be fully representative of the broader group of professionals working in positions at colleges and universities that would be classified under the umbrella of student affairs.

The population of the two professional organizations is about 19,500, but as

student affairs professionals can become members of both organizations, there is a 30% shared membership (Ruffins, 2011). This reduces the population of unique student affairs professionals in these organizations to 13,650. Therefore, a random sample of 2,500 student affairs professionals was used for this investigation, a number that was determined using CustomInsight.com's Survey Random Sample Calculator (<http://www.custominsight.com/articles/random-sample-calculator.asp>) that takes into consideration a 5% error tolerance, a desired 95% confidence interval, and a very conservative estimated return rate of 15% as online survey research typically produces a 30% response rate (Couper, 2000; Crawford, McCabe, & Pope, 2001).

To construct this overall sample size of 2,500, both professional associations provided a full membership listing to the researcher and each agreed to the random stratified selection of 1,250 members for this investigation. The ideal sample would contain equal proportions of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, but the professional associations were unable to provide membership lists by age to determine generational status. The closest proxy to ensure representativeness amongst the generational groups was to use their entry, mid-level and senior professional level designations which the associations were able to provide with senior-level status corresponding to Baby Boomers, mid-level status corresponding to Generation Xers, and entry-level status corresponding to Millennials. ACPA asks professionals to self-identify within one of these three groups, so 417 members were randomly selected from each professional level listing using a unique random integer generator list (<http://www.random.org/integers/>). NASPA's membership information

contains number of years on the profession, so those listed as having 0-5 years of experience or being graduate students were considered as entry level professionals. Those classified in the 6-10 and 11-15 years of experience categories were considered mid-level professionals, and senior professionals were those in the 16-20 and 20+ years of experience categories. As with the ACPA members, once these three lists were established, 417 members from each professional level listing were randomly selected using a unique random integer generator list. This process allowed for the final random stratified sample of 2,500 student affairs professionals.

As previously mentioned, many student affairs professionals are members of both organizations. To avoid duplicates, the random samples drawn from each organization were compared and new, unique members were pulled in turn from each organization as needed. Unfortunately due to the research policies at both professional associations, neither was able to provide descriptive or demographic data for their random samples so self-report demographic items were included on the survey instrument discussed below.

Instrument

Student affairs professionals' criteria for adulthood was measured using items originally designed by Arnett (1997) and that have subsequently been used in numerous studies examining the conceptual model of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 1998; Arnett, 2001; Arnett, 2003; Badger et al., 2006; Barry & Nelson, 2005; Cheah & Nelson, 2004; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) (See Table 2). Questions addressing student affairs professionals' personal and professional

background characteristics were added by the researcher.

Criteria for adulthood.

This section presents the evolution of the items originally designed by Arnett (1997) as the basis to assess criteria for adulthood and how these items have been utilized in numerous studies. This section ends with the scales that were used in this study.

Arnett's original survey (1997) was designed to include a wide range of possible criteria for the transition to adulthood and contained forty items based on the literature in anthropology, sociology, and psychology as well as pilot studies (Arnett, 2003). Respondents were asked to "Indicate whether you think the following must be achieved before a person can be considered to be an adult" with response options of "Yes" (i.e., necessary for adulthood) or "No" (i.e., not necessary for adulthood). In addition to background and demographic information, respondents were asked, "Do you think that you have reached adulthood?" to which they could respond "Yes," "No," or "In some respects yes, in some respects no."

Rather than organizing the criteria for transition to adulthood into subscales using a quantitative statistical approach such as factor analysis, Arnett (1997; 1998; 2001; 2003) created the following seven subscales based on conceptual and theoretical criteria from the literature: independence, interdependence, role transitions, norm compliance, biological transitions, chronological transitions, and family capacities.

Independence subscale.

The independence subscale included items such as "establish equal

relationship with parents,” financially independent from parents,” and “accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions.”

Interdependence subscale.

The interdependence subscale was created by items including “making life-long commitments to others,” being “committed to a long-term love relationship,” and “become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others.”

Role transitions subscale.

The role transitions subscale was constructed from the sociological literature which includes a series of specific role transitions as the defining criteria for the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2003). This subscale included items such as being married, finishing education, having at least one child, and being employed full-time.

Norm compliance subscale.

Items that addressed avoiding certain behaviors such as drunk driving, illegal drugs, using profanity/vulgar language and other behaviors like driving safely, driving close to the speed limit, and having no more than one sexual partner formed the basis of the norm compliance subscale.

Biological transitions subscale.

Biological transitions referred to items like growing to full height, having had sexual intercourse, and for both sexes, becoming “biologically capable of bearing/fathering children.” Reaching legal milestones such as turning eighteen or twenty-one and “obtaining a driver’s license and driving an automobile” formed the basis of the chronological transitions subscale.

Family capacities subscale.

Finally, the family capacities subscale items were all drawn from the anthropological literature that identifies “gender-specific criteria used in many traditional cultures as criteria for the transition to adulthood” (Arnett, 2003, p. 66). This subscale included items that asked if a woman or man respectively has “become capable of supporting a family financially,” “become capable of caring for children,” become capable of running a household,” and “become capable of keeping a family physically safe.”

Given the theoretical basis of the forty criteria for adulthood , Arnett (2001; 2003) considered it preferable to group the items into subscales based on their relationship within the literature to enhance the discussion and interpretation of results rather than risk having factor analysis groupings break the items from the same literature bases into different categories. Studies that have utilized the criteria for adulthood subscales between 2001 and 2005 have slightly modified the subscale names and in a few cases have added or collapsed a subscale (i.e., the addition of the interdependence subscale or the collapsing of the legal/chronological transitions subscale in with the biological/age transitions subscale). The internal reliabilities or alpha levels of the seven subscales for studies conducted between 2001 and 2005 have been reported in numerous studies (e.g., Arnett, 2001, range = .55-.88; Arnett, 2003, range = .42-.88; Barry & Nelson, 2005, range = .64-.93; Cheah & Nelson, 2004, range = .35-.90; Facio & Micocci, 2003, range = .51-.84; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003, range = .47-.88; Nelson & Barry, 2005, range = .53-.93) (see also Table 2).

Table 2
 2001-2005 Studies' Internal Reliabilities for the Criteria for Adulthood Subscales

Subscale	Study	Alpha Level
Role Transitions (e.g., married, employed full-time)	Arnett, 2001	.60
	Arnett, 2003	.73
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.80
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	.78
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.86
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.75
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.84
Norm Compliance (e.g., avoid becoming drunk, driving safely)	Arnett, 2001	.84
	Arnett, 2003	.83
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.83
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	.78
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.83
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.90
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.90
Family Capacities (e.g., become capable of caring for children, running a household)	Arnett, 2001	.88
	Arnett, 2003	.88
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.84
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	.90
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.90
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.93
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.93
Biological/Age Transitions (e.g., grow to a full height, having sexual intercourse, biologically capable of bearing/fathering children)	Arnett, 2001	.76 (called Biological Transitions)
	Arnett, 2003	.76
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.75
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	.80
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.80 (called Biological Transitions)
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.75 (called Biological Transitions)
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.79 (called Biological Transitions)
Legal/Chronological Transitions (e.g., reach age 18, reach age 21, obtain a driver's license)	Arnett, 2001	.55
	Arnett, 2003	.67 (called Chronological Transitions)
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.79 (called Chronological Transitions)
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	Subscale not utilized in this study
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	Subscale not utilized in this study
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	Subscale not utilized in this study
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	Subscale not utilized in this study

Table 2 (continued)

Subscale	Study	Alpha Level
Interdependence <i>(e.g., become less self-oriented, make life-long commitments to others)</i>	Arnett, 2001	Scale name not utilized in this study
	Arnett, 2003	.64
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.67
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	Scale name not utilized in this study
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.64
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.64
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.67
Independence <i>(e.g., accept responsibility for the consequences of your actions, financially independent from parents)</i>	Arnett, 2001	.57 (called Individualism)
	Arnett, 2003	.42
	Facio & Micocci, 2003	.51
	Mayseless & Scharf, 2003	.47 (called Individualism)
	Cheah & Nelson, 2004	.35
	Barry & Nelson, 2005	.70
	Nelson & Barry, 2005	.53

In their 2004 study, Cheah and Nelson changed the stem and response options of the criteria for the transition to adulthood items. In the studies cited above, the criteria for adulthood were prefaced with the stem, “Indicate whether you think the following must be achieved before a person can be considered to be an adult” with “Yes” or “No” response options. Cheah and Nelson modified their stem to read, “How important is this criterion for adulthood?” with response options on a scale of 1 being “Very important” and 4 being “Not at all important” which were then reverse coded. The scores were summed to determine the most important criteria for adulthood.

Additionally, to examine the extent to which respondents had achieved these criteria, Cheah and Nelson (2004) asked participants to, “Indicate the extent to which the statement *currently applies to you.*” Reverse coded response options of 1 being “Very true,” 2 as “Somewhat true,” and 3 as “Not true” were utilized for items such

as “financially independent from parents” and while for items such as “have purchased a house,” the response options were 1 for “Yes applies to me” or 2 for “No, does not apply to me.” Fewer criteria for adulthood were assessed using the “Indicate the extent to which the statement *currently applies to you*” stem as some of the items were not applicable. For example, the item “For women, become biologically capable of bearing children” did not apply to men.

Cheah and Nelson (2006) then aggregated responses into sums for the seven subcategories previously described but this time on the basis of whether the participants had achieved the criteria of independence, interdependence, role transitions, norm compliance, biological transitions, and family capacities. Numerous studies utilizing Arnett’s transition to adulthood criteria have since utilized the new item stems and response options to create continuous dependent variables (Barry & Nelson, 2005; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007).

Badger, Nelson, and Barry (2006) explored cultural differences between Chinese and Americans in the criteria young people have for becoming an adult. As part of their investigation, they “conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to assess the model based on Arnett’s (2003) conceptual factors [of independence, interdependence, role transitions, norm compliance, biological transitions, chronological transitions, and family capacities] across the two cultures” (p. 89). Using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker Lewis Indices (CFI) goodness-of-fit indices and stating that values greater than .90 were desired based on the work of Kline, they determined that the model was not acceptable for the sample size ($\chi^2 = 2305.63$, $df = 1345$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.71$, CFI = .86, TLI = .87). Badger et al. stated:

The large chi-square value indicates that there is a large discrepancy between the model implied covariance matrix and the sample covariance. The CFI and the TLI indices could not reach an acceptable level even after the model was modified based on the modification indices...A standardized factor loading of .40 or below was used as the criterion for determining low-loading items. The low magnitude of the factor loadings (ranging from .15 to .49) indicates that the variables do not measure the Independence factor well. In addition to the lack of goodness of fit and low factor loadings, the biological transitions and chronological transitions factors have a standardized correlation above 1.00, indicating that Arnett's conceptual model is unreliable and does not fit the data of this study. (p. 89)

The researchers presented an alternative model that was estimated with a two-group (China and United States) confirmatory factor analysis which allowed for the theoretical comparison of the measurement model across the two cultures. The alternative model produced five factors (see Table 3) with acceptable overall Cronbach alpha coefficients: role transitions, seven items, $\alpha = .77$; norm compliance, eight items, $\alpha = .89$; biological/age-related, nine items, $\alpha = .83$; family capacities, six items, $\alpha = .87$; and relational maturity, four items, $\alpha = .60$. According to Badger et al., the "two-group confirmatory factor analysis of this model indicates that the model fits the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2 = 1736.59$, $df = 982$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.77$, CFI = .92, TLI = .90)" (p. 90).

Given that Badger et al.'s (2006) confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated the internal validity of the subscales, their five new factors or subscales were utilized

in this investigation. The items and response options used to assess student affairs professionals of varying ages considered important to achieve adulthood mirrored those used by Badger et al. and subsequently by Nelson et al. (2007), but a different question stem was utilized that was more specific and appropriate for this investigation. Table 3 outlines the specific items that were used and Table 4 shows the internal reliabilities of the various samples utilized in the two studies (Badger et al.; Nelson et al.) that used the five new subscales as well as this investigation. To respond to the research question of “What criteria do student affairs professionals of varying ages consider necessary and important to achieve adulthood?” student affairs professionals were asked, “Please indicate your opinion on the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.”

Response options were 4 for “Very important” and 1 for “Not at all important.”

Table 3
List of Criteria for Adulthood

Subscale	Criterion
Role Transitions	Financially independent of parents or guardian No longer living in parents’ or guardians’ household Finish education Married or partnered Have at least one child Settle into long-term career Purchase a house
Norm Compliance	Avoid becoming drunk Avoid drunk driving Avoid illegal drugs Have no more than one sexual partner Avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting Drive safely and close to the speed limit Avoid use of profanity/vulgar language Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child

Source: Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007

Table 3 (continued)

Subscale	Criterion
Biological/Age Transitions	Reach age 18 Reach age 21 Grow to full height If a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children If a man, become biologically capable of fathering children Have obtained license and can drive an automobile Have sexual intercourse Allowed to drink alcohol Allowed to smoke cigarettes
Family Capacities	If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially If a man, become capable of caring for children If a woman, become capable of caring for children If a man, become capable of running a household If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe
Relational Maturity	Accepts responsibility for the consequences of one's actions Establishes a relationship with parents as an equal adult Learn always to have good control over one's emotions Become less self-oriented Develop greater consideration for others

Source: Badger et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007

Table 4

*Internal Reliabilities for Studies Utilizing the Badger et al. (2006)
Criteria for Adulthood Subscales*

Subscales	Study and Study Samples	Alpha Level
Role Transitions	Badger et al., 2006	
	American students	.81
	Chinese students	.73
	Overall sample	.77
	Nelson et al., 2007*	
	Emerging adults	.80
	Mothers	.80
Fathers	.79	

*Nelson et al. (2007) did not provide internal reliability information for their overall sample.

Table 4 (continued)

Subscales	Study and Study Samples	Alpha Level
	Pickard, 2011	
	Baby Boomers	.73
	Generation X	.78
	Millennials	.72
	Overall sample	.76
Norm Compliance	Badger et al., 2006	
	American students	.91
	Chinese students	.86
	Overall sample	.89
	Nelson et al., 2007*	
	Emerging adults	.82
	Mothers	.85
	Fathers	.85
	Pickard, 2011	
	Baby Boomers	.91
	Generation X	.89
	Millennials	.91
	Overall sample	.91
Biological/Age Transitions	Badger et al., 2006	
	American students	.84
	Chinese students	.82
	Overall sample	.83
	Nelson et al., 2007*	
	Emerging adults	.79
	Mothers	.79
	Fathers	.78
	Pickard, 2011	
	Baby Boomers	.83
	Generation X	.83
	Millennials	.81
	Overall sample	.83

*Nelson et al. (2007) did not provide internal reliability information for their overall sample.

Table 4 (continued)

Subscales	Study and Study Samples	Alpha Level	
Family Capacities	Badger et al., 2006		
	American students	.90	
	Chinese students	.81	
	Overall sample	.87	
	Nelson et al., 2007*		
	Emerging adults	.91	
	Mothers	.92	
	Fathers	.92	
	Pickard, 2011		
	Baby Boomers	.92	
	Generation X	.93	
	Millennials	.92	
	Overall sample	.93	
	Relational Maturity	Badger et al., 2006	
		American students	.62
Chinese students		.60	
Overall sample		.60	
Nelson et al., 2007*			
Emerging adults		.57	
Mothers		.67	
Fathers		.60	
Pickard, 2011			
Baby Boomers		.84	
Generation X		.81	
Millennials		.76	
Overall sample		.80	

*Nelson et al. (2007) did not provide internal reliability information for their overall sample.

Personal and professional background characteristics.

Respondents were asked to provide information on their professional background including highest level of education, type and size of institution currently

working at, and years worked within the student affairs profession. This information was used for descriptive purposes (see Chapter 4). Respondents were also asked how much direct contact they currently have with traditional undergraduates, influence past and current institutions has on their interactions with undergraduates, and if they perceive traditional undergraduates to be adults upon graduation from their institution. Finally, demographic information was asked regarding their gender (i.e., male, female, or transgender), age, race/ethnicity (i.e., Asian American or Pacific Islander; Black or African American; Hispanic, Latino/a, or Mexican American; Native American; White or Caucasian/European; Bi-racial or multiracial; or Prefer not to respond), if they are or have been married or partnered, if they have children, the ages of their children, and if their children have attended college. This information was used for descriptive purposes and post hoc analysis by various demographic variables (see Chapter 4).

Data Collection

Human subjects permissions.

University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the investigation was obtained on July 19, 2010. See Appendix E for a copy of the IRB approval email for this study.

Data collection strategy.

Data collection was conducted from September 28th, 2010 to October 15th, 2010. The survey was conducted completely via the web using StudentVoice, a higher education assessment platform. The 2,500 potential participants received an

email invitation to participate and those who had not responded by October 5th, 2010 (eight days after the initial launch) received a follow-up email to encourage participation. Initial and follow-up emails indicated that the survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and emphasized that all responses would remain confidential. On the first screen of the online survey, participants read an informed consent statement and at the end were asked, “Do you agree to participate in this study?” Participants chose between the options of, “I agree to participate,” or “I decline to participate.” See Appendices A and B for copies of the initial email invitation sent to the NASPA and ACPA membership samples respectively and Appendices C and D for the subsequent follow-up emails.

As an incentive for participation, those who completed the survey were offered the opportunity to be entered into a raffle drawing for one of four \$25 gift cards to Amazon.com. Respondents who chose to be entered into the drawing were asked to enter a separate survey screen where they provided their name and email address. Those who completed this step were assured that their survey responses would be stored in a database separate from their personal email address. Upon closure of the survey, the StudentVoice staff randomly selected four drawing winners for the researcher who notified and awarded the drawing winners their gift certificates.

Data Analyses

This exploratory study used descriptive and multivariate statistical procedures ($p < .05$) to examine student affairs professionals’ perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood

via the concept's five subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity. This section outlines procedures used to prepare the data for analysis and the analytic approach used for each of the research questions in the study. Again, the research questions examined were the following:

1. What criteria do student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses (i.e., Baby Boomers born from 1943 and 1960, Generation X born from 1961-1981, and Millennials born from 1982-2002) consider important to achieve adulthood? Does the importance of these criteria differ if analyzed using age as a continuous variable rather than being grouped into generational statuses?
2. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of role transitions in their conceptualization of adulthood?
3. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of norm compliance in their conceptualization of adulthood?
4. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of biological/age-related factors in their conceptualization of adulthood?
5. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of family capacities in their conceptualization of adulthood?
6. Does generational status influence student affairs professionals' view of relational maturity in their conceptualization of adulthood?

Data Preparation

Several procedures were conducted to prepare the data for analysis. First, the emerging adulthood subscales were created. Table 3 outlines the criteria for adulthood associated with each of the five subscales. A subscale score was created for each respondent by summing their responses to the items within a particular subscale and dividing by the total number of items within the subscale. A subscale score could only be created if the respondent had provided an answer to each of the criteria for adulthood items in the survey, so the entire dataset was cleaned to remove the 27 respondents who had not completed all of the criteria for adulthood items.

The next data preparation step involved transforming the age variable (Question 4, “What year were you born?”) into the generational status variable. Respondents who indicated being born from 1943-1960 were recoded as Baby Boomers, those born from 1961-1981 were recoded as Generation Xers, and respondents born from 1982-2002 were recoded as Millennials.

The last step of the data preparation involved calculating internal reliabilities for the criteria for adulthood subscales (Badger et al., 2006) using the respondents in this study. The overall Cronbach alpha coefficients (see Table 4) for the norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity subscales were all considered “preferable” indicators of internal consistency reliability because their scores were at .80 and above while the role transitions value was considered “acceptable” in determining internal consistency reliability as it was above .70 (Pallant, 2010).

Internal reliabilities were also calculated by generational status for each

subscale. Table 4 shows the subscale internal reliabilities for this study (Pickard, 2011) as compared to the samples used by Badger et al. (2006) and Nelson et al. (2007). The current study produced subscale internal reliabilities similar to the other studies' samples and in the case of relational maturity, this study produced a much higher overall Cronbach alpha level than Badger et al. (.80 as compared to .60). Nelson et al. did not provide an overall sample Cronbach alpha coefficients, but the subgroups within their sample (emerging adults, mothers, and fathers) had relational maturity Cronbach alphas of .57, .67, and .60 respectively.

The first research question was addressed using two procedures. First, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if student affairs professionals from different generational statuses had different estimates of the importance of the individual criteria to achieve adulthood. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted on items where the generational statuses differed to determine which generational statuses were significantly different from one another. The second analysis procedure for the first research question used Pearson's correlation to determine if there was a relationship between student affairs professionals' age and their estimates of the importance of the individual criteria to achieve adulthood.

The second through sixth research questions were addressed using one-way ANOVAs to determine if student affairs professionals from different generational status had different estimates of the importance on the criteria for adulthood subscales – role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related, family capacities, and relational maturity. Post-hoc comparisons were conducted on the subscales where the generational statuses differed to determine which generational statuses were

significantly different from one another.

Chapter Summary

This study used the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood to examine student affairs professionals from different generational statuses perceptions of college student adulthood. Specifically, the research questions examined differences by generational status of the importance of the individual criteria that comprise adulthood and the importance of these criteria when grouped into the five subscales of emerging adulthood: role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity. The study used data collected via an online survey of student affairs professionals who are members of two national associations, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and ACPA– College Student Educators International. The data was analyzed using analysis of variance and bivariate correlation procedures. The method used for this study provided the first opportunity to determine where generational differences or similarities exist among student affairs professionals in their perceptions of college student adulthood.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. The study was exploratory as the population of student affairs professionals has not been examined in relation to this theoretical concept. This chapter presents results from several types of data analyses, including a descriptive analysis of participants' demographic and background characteristics; mean score analysis on criteria student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses consider important to achieve adulthood; bivariate correlation to determine if there was a relationship between student affairs professionals' age and their estimates of the importance of the individual criteria to achieve adulthood; and analysis of variance results on differences by generational status on individual criterion for adulthood and on the emerging adulthood subscales.

Demographic Characteristics

The descriptive analysis provided an initial snapshot of the study's respondents. Table 5 contains the complete findings from the descriptive analysis. The overall sample size for the Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of Transition to Adulthood Survey was 2,500 of which 654 submitted usable surveys for an overall return rate of 26.2%. This return rate was slightly lower than the desired 30% response rate typical in web-based survey research (Couper, 2000; Crawford et al., 2001). Using the CustomInsight.com's Survey Random Sample Calculator

(<http://www.custominsight.com/articles/random-sample-calculator.asp>), the survey result accuracy was calculated using the total student affairs professional population of 13,650 and the 654 survey respondents. This calculation indicated that with a 95% confidence interval, this survey had a 3.7% error level.

Among the 654 student affairs professional respondents, 19% ($n = 122$) were Baby Boomers, 58% ($n = 377$) were from Generation X, and 24% ($n = 155$) were Millennials. About two-thirds or 67% ($n = 439$) of the sample were women and within the generational subgroups, women comprised two-thirds of the Baby Boomers (65%; $n = 79$) and Millennials (65%; $n = 243$) subgroups while about three-quarters (74%; $n = 115$) of the Millennial subgroup were women. The vast majority of respondents (80%; $n = 525$) indicated being White or Caucasian/European while 19% ($n = 125$) identified as being student affairs professionals of color, and 1% ($n = 7$) indicated they preferred not to respond to the question. Within the generational statuses, Generation Xers and Millennials were slightly more diverse than the overall population with professionals of color comprising 20% ($n = 77$) and 24% ($n = 37$) of the respective subgroups. The Baby Boomer subgroup was 91% ($n = 111$) White with 8% ($n = 10$) professionals of color and one respondent (1%) preferring not to respond.

The sample was compared to the population from which it was drawn (the membership listings of ACPA and NASPA) for gender and race/ethnicity. The female student affairs professionals in this sample (67%) were relatively comparable in terms of gender as approximately 62% of the NASPA population. ACPA reports that females comprise 55% of their population, 37% are males, and 9% did not report

their gender (K. Cilente, personal communication, March 3, 2011). This sample underrepresented student affairs professionals of color (19%) though as 37% of the NASPA population and 26% of the ACPA population identified as being professionals of color while 4% did not report their race/ethnicity (K. Cilente, personal communication, February 28, 2011).

When examining demographics related to personal relationships, 63% ($n = 412$) of the overall sample indicated being partnered or married with about three-quarters of Baby Boomers (76%; $n = 93$) and over two-thirds of Generation Xers (70%; $n = 263$) indicated a married or partnered status. Significantly fewer Millennials (35%; $n = 54$) were married or partnered. Over one-third (37%; $n = 244$) of the overall sample had children. Only 4% ($n = 6$) of the Millennials had children while 66% ($n = 80$) and 42% ($n = 157$) of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers respectively had children. Only Generation Xers and Baby Boomers had children age 18 or older and. Eighty-four percent of the Baby Boomers with children had at least one child over age 18 while only 5% of the Generation Xers' with children had a child who was age 18 or older. Of the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers with children over the age of 18, the majority of these children (76% and 82% respectively) had attended at least one semester of college.

Demographics related to the profession of student affairs revealed that the vast majority of the sample held an advanced degree (66% or $n = 431$ with a M.A./M.S./M.Ed. and 27% or $n = 174$ with a Ph.D.). Baby Boomers had the largest percentage of doctoral degrees (57%) as compared to the 27% of Generation Xers who had completed doctorates. Millennials' highest educational attainment was at

Table 5
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Characteristic		Overall Sample	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial
		<i>N</i> = 654	<i>n</i> = 122	<i>n</i> = 377	<i>n</i> = 155
		Valid Percent*			
Gender	Female	67	65	65	74
	Male	33	35	35	26
	Transgender	<1	0	<1	0
Race/Ethnicity	Asian American or Pacific Islander	3	1	3	4
	Black or African American	8	6	9	8
	Hispanic, Latino/a, or Mexican American	4	2	5	5
	Native American	<1	0	<1	0
	White or Caucasian/European	80	91	79	75
	Biracial or Multiracial	4	0	3	8
	Prefer not to respond	1	1	1	1
Relationship status	Married/Partnered	63	76	70	35
Children	Has child/children	37	66	42	4
	Has child/children age 18 or older	13	84 (<i>n</i> = 80)	5 (<i>n</i> = 17)	0
	Has child/children age 18 or older that attended college for at least one semester	12	76 (<i>n</i> = 80)	82 (<i>n</i> = 17)	0

*Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Table 5 (continued)

		Overall Sample <i>N</i> = 654	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> = 122	Generation X <i>n</i> = 377	Millennial <i>n</i> = 155
Characteristic		Valid Percent*			
Highest educational attainment	Ph.D.	27	57	27	0
	J.D.	1	3	<1	0
	M.A./M.S./M.Ed.	66	40	69	78
	B.A./B.S.	7	0	3	21
	Other	1	1	<1	1
Years of professional student affairs experience	0 - 4	27	2	10	88
	5 - 9	20	3	29	12
	10 - 14	15	3	25	0
	15 - 19	12	6	19	0
	20 - 24	10	15	13	0
	25 - 29	6	25	3	0
	30 or more	8	60	0	0
Average time of work week spent in direct contact with undergraduate students	Less than 25%	28	48	29	8
	25-49%	19	22	21	14
	50-74%	22	13	22	29
	75% or more	31	17	28	49

*Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Table 5 (continued)

		Overall Sample <i>N</i> = 654	Baby Boomer <i>n</i> = 122	Generation X <i>n</i> = 377	Millennial <i>n</i> = 155
Characteristic		Valid Percent*			
Institutional type	Doctoral/research univ – public	39	42	39	34
	Doctoral/research univ – private	16	12	16	18
	Master’s college/univ – public	13	16	13	10
	Master’s college/univ – private	13	12	13	13
	Baccalaureate college – public	3	2	2	7
	Baccalaureate college – private	9	5	9	12
	Associate college	5	8	5	3
	Other	2	3	2	3
Total enrollment of institution	30,000 and above	18	18	17	21
	20,000 – 29,000	18	18	19	17
	15,000 – 19,999	12	15	11	8
	11,000 – 14,999	11	12	12	10
	5,000 – 10,999	17	18	17	17
	4,999 and below	23	19	24	27
Current title	Graduate Assistant	6	0	3	19
	Coordinator	21	3	16	52
	Assistant/Associate Director	21	7	25	24
	Director	29	33	32	4
	Dean of Students	6	12	12	0
	Assistant/Associate Vice President	6	18	5	0
	Vice President	4	12	3	0
	Faculty	2	7	1	0
	Other	3	8	4	1

*Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Table 5 (continued)

Characteristic		Overall Sample	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial
		<i>N</i> = 654	<i>n</i> = 122	<i>n</i> = 377	<i>n</i> = 155
		Valid Percent*			
Functional area	Academic advising	5	7	5	6
	Admissions/registrar	1	0	2	3
	Assessment	2	6	2	1
	Career services	4	3	5	4
	Commuter & off-campus living	0	0	0	0
	Counseling services	1	2	2	0
	Disability support services	1	0	1	1
	Faculty	1	4	1	0
	Financial aid	1	1	<1	1
	Fraternity and sorority advising programs	2	2	1	4
	Graduate preparation program	1	3	1	1
	International student services	<1	1	0	0
	Leadership development	3	1	3	2
	Minority/multicultural affairs	2	2	2	4
	Orientation	2	1	2	3
	Parent and family affairs	1	1	0	1
	Study abroad	<1	0	<1	0
	Women's services	1	1	1	1
	GLBT student services	<1	0	1	0
	Recreational affairs	1	1	1	1
	Student activities/student government	10	3	10	14
	Student conduct	3	3	5	1

*Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Table 5 (continued)

Characteristic		Overall Sample	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial
		<i>N</i> = 654	<i>n</i> = 122	<i>n</i> = 377	<i>n</i> = 155
		Valid Percent			
Functional area (continued)	Residence life and housing	27	10	26	45
	Service learning	1	0	1	2
	Student union	2	3	2	1
	Other (please specify)				
	Student affairs administration/Generalist/Oversee multiple departments	15	34	16	2
	Other	12	16	12	4

*Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

the Master's level with the majority of the subgroup in this category (78%) while the remaining 21% of Millennials' highest degree was a bachelor's degree. For this sample, the number of years respondents had worked in the profession ranged from under one full year to 45 years. The mean number of years respondents worked in the profession was 12.6 years ($SD = 10.11$). Respondents were asked to estimate how much of their average work week is spent in direct contact with undergraduate students and the responses were distributed fairly evenly across the response spectrum. Twenty-eight percent ($n = 182$) indicated spending less than a quarter of their time with undergraduates; 19% ($n = 126$) responded that they spent between a quarter and half of their time with undergraduates; 22% ($n = 144$) marked that half to three-quarters of their time was spent with undergrads; and 31% ($n = 200$) stated that 75% or more of their time was spent in direct contact with undergraduates. When responses were examined by generational status, the majority of Baby Boomers (70%) indicated spending less than half of their week in direct contact with undergraduate students while Generation Xers' time spent with undergraduates was comparable to the overall sample. Millennials had the most direct interaction with students as 78% indicated they spent half or more of their time with undergraduates.

Additional demographic responses of the overall sample and delineated by generational status to items about institutional type, institutional enrollment, current position, and functional area of the respondents are presented in Table 5.

Research Question 1

The first research question examined what criteria student affairs

professionals of varying generational statuses consider important to achieve adulthood, so analysis for this question was broken into two parts – examining mean scores of the overall sample and by generational groups and then examining one-way analyses of variance to determine if statistically significant differences exist by generational status on the 34 criteria for adulthood.

Mean Scores for Overall Sample and By Generational Status

First, using the responses to the statements, “Please indicate your opinion on the importance of each of the following [criterion] in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood,” mean scores for the overall sample were calculated for each of the 34 criteria for adulthood. The response options for each criterion or item was on a 4-point semantic differential scale with 1 corresponding to “Not at all important” and 4 corresponding to “Important.”

For the overall sample of student affairs professionals, the five most important criteria in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood were: (a) “accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions” ($M = 3.84, SD = .46$); “develop greater consideration for others” ($M = 3.42, SD = .73$); “become less self-oriented” ($M = 3.25, SD = .76$); “financially independent from parents/guardians” ($M = 3.19, SD = .78$); and “establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult” ($M = 3.16, SD = .89$). Table 6 contains the overall sample's means and standard deviations for each of the 34 criteria for adulthood.

Table 6

Criteria for Adulthood Means and Standard Deviations for the Overall Sample (N = 657)

Please indicate your opinion on the IMPORTANCE of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood:	Mean*	Standard Deviation
Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions	3.84	.46
Develop greater consideration for others	3.42	.73
Become less self-oriented	3.25	.76
Financially independent from parents/guardians	3.19	.78
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	3.16	.89
Learn always to have good control of one's emotions	3.13	.79
Avoids drunk driving	3.12	1.05
Avoids committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	3.11	1.05
No longer living in parents'/guardians' household	3.01	.83
Uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	2.95	.99
Avoids illegal drugs	2.93	1.09
If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	2.88	.92
If a man, become capable of running a household	2.86	.92
If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	2.66	.95
If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	2.65	.96
If a man, become capable of caring for children	2.64	.99
If a woman, become capable of caring for children	2.55	1.00
Avoids becoming drunk	2.54	.99
Settled into a long-term career	2.43	.98
Reach age 21	2.39	.98
Has finished education	2.36	.93
Drives safely and close to the speed limit	2.30	.90
Reach age 18	2.25	.95

*4-point semantic differential response scale with 1 corresponding to "Not at all important" and 4 corresponding to "Important"

Table 6 (continued)

Please indicate your opinion on the IMPORTANCE of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood:	Mean*	Standard Deviation
Has no more than one sexual partner	2.12	.98
Avoids use of profanity/vulgar language	2.11	.90
Has purchased a house	2.07	1.11
Married/partnered	2.04	1.13
Has at least one child	1.71	1.02
Allowed to drink alcohol	1.67	.83
Has obtained license and can drive an automobile	1.66	.77
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	1.53	.75
Grow to a full height	1.50	.77
If a woman, become biologically capable of bearing children	1.49	.74
If a man, become biologically capable of fathering children	1.47	.73
Has had sexual intercourse	1.37	.60

*4-point semantic differential response scale with 1 corresponding to “Not at all important” and 4 corresponding to “Important”

When examining the five most important criteria in determining adulthood for by generational statuses, “accepting responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions” and “develop greater consideration for others” were in the number one and two positions respectively for Baby Boomers ($M = 3.88, SD = .46$; $M = 3.50, SD = .66$), Generation Xers ($M = 3.82, SD = .49$; $M = 3.39, SD = .77$), and Millennials ($M = 3.86, SD = .39$; $M = 3.44, SD = .69$). For Baby Boomers, the third, fourth, and fifth place were “establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult” ($M = 3.38, SD = .83$), “become less self-oriented” ($M = 3.36, SD = .65$), and “avoids drunk driving” ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.05$) respectively. For Generation Xers, “become less self-oriented” ($M = 3.24, SD = .79$), “financially independent from parents/guardians” ($M = 3.14, SD = .80$), and “learn always to have good control over one’s emotions” ($M = 3.11,$

$SD = .82$) were third, fourth, and fifth most important criterion for adulthood while Millennials had “financially independent from parents/guardians” ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .66$), “become less self-oriented” ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .75$), and “learn to always have good control of one’s emotions” ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .75$), in the last three positions respectively. Table 7 outlines the five most important criteria in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood by the overall sample and by each generational status.

Analysis of Variance by Generational Status

For the second portion of the analysis, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were employed to determine if statistically significant differences existed by generational status on the 34 criteria for adulthood. The type of repeated measures design used is prone to inflate the likelihood of Type I error, so a Bonferroni adjustment was applied which serves as a multiple-comparison correction when several dependent or independent statistical tests are being performed simultaneously to ensure the alpha value is appropriate for the set of not just each individual comparison, but the set of all comparisons. This correction results in a lowered alpha value to account for the number of comparisons being performed (Weisstein, 2011). Generational status served as the independent variable and rating of importance in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood for each specific criterion served as the dependent variable. Twelve of the 34 criteria for adulthood produced statistically significant differences between the responses of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials: avoids becoming drunk [$F(2,651) = 5.25$, $p = .005$];

drives safely and close to the speed limit [$F(2,651) = 13.32, p = .000$]; avoids use of profanity/vulgar language [$F(2,651) = 5.14, p = .006$]; uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child [$F(2,651) = 4.71, p = .009$]; allowed to drink alcohol [$F(2,651) = 6.29, p = .002$];

Table 7
Top Five Criteria for Adulthood Means by the Overall Sample and Generational Status

	Overall Sample	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennial
1.	Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions	Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions	Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions	Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions
2.	Develop greater consideration for others	Develop greater consideration for others	Develop greater consideration for others	Develop greater consideration for others
3.	Become less self-oriented	Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	Become less self-oriented	Financially independent from parents/guardians
4.	Financially independent from parents/guardians	Become less self-oriented	Financially independent from parents/guardians	Become less self-oriented
5.	Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	Avoids drunk driving	Learn always to have good control over one's emotions	Learn to always have good control of one's emotions

allowed to smoke cigarettes [$F(2,651) = 6.12, p = .002$]; if a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially [$F(2,651) = 4.66, p = .010$]; if a man, become capable of caring for children [$F(2,651) = 4.11, p = .017$]; if a man, become capable of running a household [$F(2,651) = 6.21, p = .002$]; if a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe [$F(2,651) = 6.84, p = .001$]; if a woman, become

capable of keeping family physically safe [$F(2,651) = 7.01, p = .001$]; and establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult [$F(2,651) = 4.71, p = .009$].

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD post hoc criterion for significance were performed on the twelve criteria that produced statistically significant results (see Table 8). For seven of the criteria, the post hoc analyses revealed that Baby Boomers rated the importance of these criteria for adulthood significantly more important than Generation Xers and Millennials. Specifically for “avoid becoming drunk,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.02$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.02$) and Millennials ($M = 2.43, SD = .88$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. Baby Boomers’ mean score on “drives safely and close to the speed limit” ($M = 2.66, SD = .94$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.22, SD = .90$) and Millennials ($M = 2.18, SD = .79$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. For “avoids use of profanity/vulgar language,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 2.34, SD = .86$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.06, SD = .91$) and Millennials ($M = 2.05, SD = .83$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. Baby Boomers’ mean score on “if a man, become capable of caring for children” ($M = 2.86, SD = .96$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.00$) and Millennials ($M = 2.54, SD = .96$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. For “if a man, become capable of running a household,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 3.12, SD = .87$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.80, SD = .93$) and Millennials

($M = 2.82$, $SD = .88$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. Baby Boomers' mean score on "if a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe" ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .91$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .98$) and Millennials ($M = 2.61$, $SD = .91$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials. Finally, for "if a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe," Baby Boomers' mean score ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .88$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.58$, $SD = .98$) and Millennials ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .91$), but there were no significant differences between Generation Xers and the Millennials.

Table 8
Tukey HSD Post Hoc Criterion Analysis - Criterion for Adulthood by Generational Status

Criterion	Baby Boomer (BB)		Generation X (GX)		Millennial (MI)		Post Hoc Result*
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
If a man, become capable of running a household	3.12	.87	2.80	.93	2.82	.88	BB > GX, MI
If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	2.94	.88	2.58	.98	2.62	.91	BB > GX, MI
If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	2.93	.91	2.57	.98	2.61	.91	BB > GX, MI
If a man, become capable of caring for children	2.86	.96	2.61	1.00	2.54	.96	BB > GX, MI

* Interpretation of post hoc result: Mean score of generational status (BB, GX, or MI) is statistically significantly greater (>) at the $p < .05$ level than one or both of the other generational statuses mean scores.

Table 8 (continued)

Criterion	Baby Boomer (BB)		Generation X (GX)		Millennial (MI)		Post Hoc Result*
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Avoids becoming drunk	2.80	1.02	2.50	1.02	2.43	.88	BB > GX, MI
Drives safely and close to the speed limit	2.66	.94	2.22	.90	2.18	.79	BB > GX, MI
Avoids use of profanity/vulgar language	2.34	.86	2.06	.91	2.05	.83	BB > GX, MI
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	3.38	.83	3.10	.90	NS	NS	BB > GX
Uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	3.17	.99	2.86	1.02	NS	NS	BB > GX
If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	3.10	.89	2.81	.93	NS	NS	BB > GX
Allowed to drink alcohol	1.58	.85	1.62	.80	1.88	.86	MI > BB, GX
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	1.49	.81	1.47	.72	1.72	.77	MI > BB, GX

* Interpretation of post hoc result: Mean score of generational status (BB, GX, or MI) is statistically significantly greater (>) at the $p < .05$ level than one or both of the other generational statuses mean scores.

For three of the criteria, the Tukey HSD post hoc analyses revealed that Baby Boomers rated the importance of these criteria for adulthood significantly more important than Generation Xers alone. Specifically for “uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .99$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.86$, SD

=1.02), but there were no significant differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials nor Generation Xers and Millennials. For “if a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 3.10, SD = .89$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.81, SD = .93$) and for “establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult,” Baby Boomers’ mean score ($M = 3.38, SD = .83$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 3.10, SD = .90$), but for both criterion, there were no significant differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials nor Generation Xers and Millennials.

Finally for two criteria, the Tukey HSD post hoc analyses revealed that Millennials rated the importance of these criteria for adulthood significantly more important than the Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. Specifically for “allowed to drink alcohol,” Millennials’ mean score ($M = 1.88, SD = .86$) was significantly different from the Baby Boomers ($M = 1.58, SD = .85$) and Generation Xers ($M = 1.62, SD = .80$) and for “allowed to smoke cigarettes,” Millennials’ mean score ($M = 1.72, SD = .77$) was significantly different from the Baby Boomers ($M = 1.49, SD = .81$) and Generation Xers ($M = 1.47, SD = .72$). For “allowed to drink alcohol” and “allowed to smoke cigarettes,” the Tukey HSD post hoc analyses indicated there were no significant differences between Baby Boomers and Generation Xers.

Analysis Using Age versus Generational Status as Independent Variable

The first research question also asked if the importance of the 34 criteria for adulthood differed if analyzed using age as a continuous variable rather than being grouped into generational statuses. Two-tailed Pearson correlations were conducted

to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between the importance of the criteria for adulthood and age. Eighteen of the criteria for adulthood produced significant relationships (see Table 9), but the strength of each correlation is considered very small to small as they range from $r = .08$ to $r = .23$ (Pallant, 2010). The majority of the significant correlations indicated a negative relationship so that as age increased, the rating of importance for the specific criterion for adulthood decreased. Only two criteria for adulthood produced weak, positive correlations – “allowed to drink alcohol” ($r = .10, n = 654, p = .015$) and “allowed to smoke cigarettes” ($r = .08, n = 654, p = .039$) indicating that as age increased, the rating of importance for being allowed to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes as an indicator of adulthood increased as well.

*Table 9
Significant Results of Two-Tailed Pearson Correlations with Age as Independent Variable and Importance of Criterion for Adulthood as Dependent Variable*

Criterion	Pearson Correlation (r)	Two-tailed Significance (p)
Allowed to drink alcohol	.10	.015
Allowed to smoke cigarettes	.08	.039
Avoids committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting	-.08	.039
If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially	-.08	.035
Avoids illegal drug use	-.09	.023
Become less self-oriented	-.09	.030
Avoids drunk driving	-.10	.015
Has more than one sexual partner	-.10	.013
Uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child	-.11	.004

Table 9 (continued)

Criterion	Pearson Correlation (<i>r</i>)	Two-tailed Significance (<i>p</i>)
If a woman, become capable of caring for children	-.11	.006
If a man, become capable of caring for children	-.12	.001
If a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe	-.12	.003
Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult	-.12	.003
If a woman, become capable of keeping family physically safe	-.13	.001
Avoids becoming drunk	-.17	.000
Avoids use of profane/vulgar language	-.17	.000
Drives safely and close to speed limit	-.29	.000

Research Questions 2 - 6

The remaining research questions sought to determine if generational status influenced student affairs professionals' view of emerging adulthood's five subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity respectively in their conceptualization of adulthood. These questions were answered by conducting one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) to determine if statistically significant differences exist by generational status on the five subscales of emerging adulthood. Generational status served as the independent variable and the five dependent variables were calculated subscale scores indicating the importance in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. Table 10 outlines the means and standard deviations of the emerging adulthood subscales. Two of the five subscales of emerging adulthood produced statistically significant

Table 10

Emerging Adulthood Subscales: Means and Standard Deviations for the Overall Sample and Tukey HSD Post Hoc Criterion Analysis by Generational Status

Subscale	Overall Sample		Baby Boomer (BB)		Generation X (GX)		Millennial (MI)		Post Hoc Result*
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Relational Maturity	3.36	.55	3.45	.53	3.33	.58	3.36	.51	Not Significant
Family Capacities	2.71	.82	2.95	.77	2.65	.84	2.65	.77	BB > GX, MI
Norm Compliance	2.65	.78	2.86	.78	2.59	.80	2.62	.70	BB > GX, MI
Role Transitions	2.40	.62	2.45	.64	2.41	.64	2.37	.57	Not Significant
Biological/Age-related Factors	1.70	.52	1.70	.53	1.68	.52	1.76	.49	Not Significant

* Interpretation of post hoc result: Mean score for Baby Boomers is statistically significantly greater (>) at the $p < .05$ level than the Generation X and Millennial mean scores; Not significant indicates no statistically significant differences between the generational statuses.

differences between the responses of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials: norm compliance [$F(2,651) = 5.74, p = .003$]; and family capacities [$F(2,651) = 6.71, p = .001$]. The three remaining subscales of role transitions [$F(2,651) = .33, p = .721$], biological/age-related factors [$F(2,651) = 1.07, p = .344$], and relational maturity [$F(2,651) = 2.30, p = .101$] did not produce significant differences by generational status.

Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD post hoc criterion for significance were performed on the norm compliance and family capacities subscales as they produced statistically significant results. The post hoc analyses revealed that Baby Boomers rated the importance of these two subscales of emerging adulthood significantly more important than Generation Xers and Millennials. Specifically for the norm

compliance subscale, Baby Boomers' mean score ($M = 2.86, SD = .78$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.59, SD = .80$) and Millennials ($M = 2.62, SD = .70$), but there were no significant differences on the norm compliance subscale between Generation Xers and the Millennials. For the family capacities subscale, Baby Boomers' mean score ($M = 2.95, SD = .77$) was significantly different from the Generation Xers ($M = 2.65, SD = .84$) and Millennials ($M = 2.65, SD = .77$), but again there were no significant differences on the norm compliance subscale between Generation Xers and the Millennials.

Post Hoc Analyses

As the survey contained personal and professional background characteristics that were not addressed in the above analysis, additional post hoc analyses were performed on the five emerging adulthood subscales (role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity). Demographics including respondents' years in the profession, gender, race, parental status, current institutional type, and amount of time spent with students in a given week were all examined in relation to the emerging adulthood subscales using one-way analyses of variance or independent samples t-tests as appropriate. Additionally, two survey items focused on the student affairs professionals' views of college students as adults were analyzed in relation to the emerging adulthood subscales and generational status using one-way analyses of variance.

Demographic Post Hoc Analyses

The item that asked, "How many years of professional student affairs

experience do you have?” was recoded into three categories: 0-4 years of experience ($n = 177$), 5-9 years of experience ($n = 134$), and 10 or more years of experience ($n = 342$). These categories correspond with the literature defining entry-level, mid-level, and senior student affairs professionals respectively. One-way ANOVAs were conducted with the three levels of student affairs professionals based on years of experience in the field as the independent variable and the five dependent variables were the five calculated subscale scores indicating the importance in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. Only one of the five subscales of emerging adulthood produced statistically significant differences between the responses of entry-level professionals, mid-level professionals and senior student affairs professionals – family capacities [$F(2,650) = 4.03, p = .018$]. Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD post hoc criterion for significance was performed on the family capacities subscales and revealed that senior student affairs professionals ($M = 2.79, SD = .83$) rated the importance of this subscale of emerging adulthood significantly more important than mid-level professionals ($M = 2.58, SD = .79$).

Independent samples t-tests were performed to compare each of five emerging adulthood subscale scores for males and females. Significantly different results existed between males ($M = 2.78, SD = .75$) and females ($M = 2.67, SD = .85$) only for the family capacities subscale [$t(650) = 1.73, p = .009$].

Race was also examined in relation to the five emerging adulthood subscales using a one-way analysis of variance. Only Asian American/Pacific Islander ($n = 20$), Black/African American ($n = 51$), Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American ($n = 28$), White/Caucasian/European ($n = 523$), and Biracial/Multiracial ($n = 24$) were included

in the analysis as there were too few Native Americans ($n = 1$) for analysis and those who preferred not to respond ($n = 6$) were also excluded. Role transitions was the only subscales of emerging adulthood that produced statistically significant difference based on race [$F(4,641) = 5.54, p = .000$]. Post hoc analyses using Tukey HSD post hoc criterion for significance was performed on the role transitions subscale and revealed that Hispanic/Latino/Mexican American respondents ($M = 2.86, SD = .66$) rated the importance of this subscale of emerging adulthood significantly more important than White/Caucasian/European respondents ($M = 2.36, SD = .61$).

The five emerging adulthood scales were also examined by those who have children and those who do not using independent samples t-tests. For the role transitions subscale, significantly different results existed between those who had children ($M = 2.42, SD = .67$) and those who did not have children ($M = 2.39, SD = .59; t(651) = .6, p = .009$). Of those who had children, independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the five emerging adulthood subscale scores for those with children over the age of 18 and those under the age of 18. There were no significant differences on any of the subscales between those with children over 18 and those with children under 18.

Finally, both respondents' institutional type and the estimated time spent in direct contact with undergraduates per week (less than 25%, 25-49%, 50-74%, or 75% or more) were analyzed in relation to the five subscales of emerging adulthood. One-way analyses of variance indicated that neither institutional type nor estimated time spent in direct contact with undergraduates produced statistically significant results in relation to the emerging adulthood subscales.

Student Affairs Professional View of Undergraduates as Adults Post Hoc

Analyses

Two items were included in the survey to gauge student affairs professionals' perceptions of new students and graduating students as adults: "I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who enter as first-time, first-year students to be adults," and "I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who graduate from my institution to be adults." Both of these statements were answered using a 5-point response scale with 5 corresponding to "strongly agree" and 1 corresponding to "strongly disagree" with an additional response option of "not applicable." Not applicable responses were removed for analysis procedures. The two items were analyzed in relation to generational status and one-way analyses of variance indicated that neither item had statistically significant differences by generational status. The mean score for student affairs professionals' response to the statement, "I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who enter as first-time, first-year students to be adults," was 2.90 ($SD = 1.13$) and, "I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who graduate from my institution to be adults" produced a mean score of 3.86 ($SD = 1.02$).

Chapter Summary

This exploratory study examined student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Of the 34 criteria for adulthood, student affairs professionals rated accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions, developing

greater consideration for others; becoming less self-oriented, being financially independent from parents/guardians, and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult as the most important criteria respectively in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. When looking at the top five criteria for adulthood ratings by generational status, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials all rated accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions as the most important criterion and developing greater consideration for others as second most important. Becoming less self-oriented rated in the third or fourth most highly rated criteria for all three generational statuses and for Generation Xers and Millennials, the becoming financially independent from parents/guardians and learning to always have good control over one's emotions rounded out their top five criteria for adulthood. Baby Boomers included establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult and avoids drunk driving in their top five criteria in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.

Analyses of variance on rating of importance in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood for each specific criterion for adulthood given generational status revealed 12 statistically significant criteria: avoids becoming drunk; drives safely and close to the speed limit; avoids use of profanity/vulgar language; uses contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child; allowed to drink alcohol; allowed to smoke cigarettes; if a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially; if a man, become capable of caring for children; if a man, become capable of running a household ; if a man, become capable of keeping family physically safe; if a woman, become capable of keeping family physically

safe; and establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult. Post hoc analyses were performed to determine where the specific differences existed between the generational statuses. Finally, bivariate correlations were conducted to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between the importance of the criteria for adulthood and age rather than generational status. Sixteen of the criteria for adulthood produced significant, negative relationships in that as age increased, the rating of importance for the specific criteria as an indicator of adulthood decreased. Simultaneously, two of the criteria for adulthood produced significant, positive relationships in that as age increased, the rating of importance for the specific criteria as an indicator of adulthood increased. But for all of the 18 criteria that produced significant relationships between rating of importance and age, the strength of the relationships was considered very small or small.

Analyses of variance were also used to determine if statistically significant differences existed by generational status on the five subscales of emerging adulthood - role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity. The norm compliance and family capacities subscales produced statistically significant results by generational status and post hoc analysis indicated that Baby Boomers rated the importance of these two subscales significantly more important than Generation Xers and Millennials.

Finally, post hoc analyses of demographic characteristics on the five emerging adulthood scales produced significant differences for the family capacities subscale given years in the student affairs profession and gender. Significant differences were also found on the role transitions subscale given race and being a

parent. No significant differences were detected on each of the emerging adulthood subscales based on institutional type or estimated time spent working directly with undergraduates in a given week. The last post hoc test revealed that there were no generational differences when examining the statements “I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who enter as first-time, first-year students to be adults,” and “I consider the majority of the traditional undergraduate students who graduate from my institution to be adults.” Instead, frequencies indicate that student affairs professionals did not believe that the majority of entering traditional undergraduates are adults, but student affairs professionals did agree that traditional graduating undergraduates are adults.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This exploratory study examined student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood employing the conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Using the five subscales of emerging adulthood (role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age-related factors, family capacities, and relational maturity), the criteria that student affairs professionals consider most important to achieve adulthood were examined and the influence of generational status (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) on student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood were explored. This chapter begins with a discussion of the results in the context of the existing literature, and the subsequent section explores the limitations associated with this study. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and policy within student affairs and higher education as well as directions for future research.

Summary of the Results

Over the past 40 years, American social and economic conditions have shifted in ways that have resulted in an elongated period of time during which young people achieve the traditionally accepted markers of adulthood including finishing school, leaving the parental home, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005; Hogan & Astone, 1986; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Shanahan, Porfeli et al., 2005). The new developmental period of emerging adulthood has been forwarded as an explanation for this prolonged period when

young people, particularly those who are the age of traditional college students, feel as if they are neither an adolescent nor an adult (Arnett 1997; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2006a). Studies that have utilized the conceptualization of emerging adulthood (Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) have found that both traditional college students and their parents alike believe that the students are not yet adults during the college years. Concurrently though, student affairs professionals work in college and university cultures that, for most purposes, consider students to be adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008). The changing perceptions of students and parents regarding adulthood juxtaposed to the higher education environment that treats students as adult creates a unique opportunity to research if student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood are synchronous or asynchronous to the students and parents with whom student affairs professionals work.

This investigation was considered exploratory research, as to date no other known studies have examined student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college students as emerging adults. As an exploratory investigation, this study provided a first glimpse of the criteria student affairs professionals believe necessary to reach adulthood and insight into where similarities and differences in perceptions of adulthood exist based the generational status of student affairs professionals. The study also offered insight into if student affairs professionals view traditional students as adults and thus if emerging adulthood is salient to the daily work in higher education. Finally, the findings helped reveal a pattern of criteria that are most important in the conceptualization of adulthood for traditional college students, their parents, and student affairs professionals alike. The following discussion will touch

on each of these areas, but first, the demographic profile of the student affairs professionals who participated in this study is presented.

Demographic Profile of Student Affairs Professionals in Relation to Emerging Adulthood

Demographic findings are important in understanding and discussing the results of any investigation, but in the case of emerging adulthood, they are particularly noteworthy as the concept is rooted in demographic shifts and trends (Arnett, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006a). The demographic profile of the respondents is discussed as it creates a unique context that has implications on the interpretation of student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood.

This investigation produced a response rate that, based on its sheer size, allows for the responses to be generalized to the entire population of student affairs professionals. While the respondents were representative of the population of student affairs professionals' gender composition, they unfortunately were not representative based on ethnicity. The investigation's respondents were 19% professionals of color while the student affairs population as a whole contains roughly 30% professionals of color. This underrepresentation by ethnicity was significant in that one of the primary critiques of the concept of emerging adulthood is that it describes path to adulthood for only a specific set of individuals within society (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007) and can vary considerably by cultural context, educational attainment, and social class (Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, & Tanner, 2011). While the findings of this investigation hold validity, the fact that the respondents are not representative by

ethnicity feeds into the broader question of bias within the emerging adulthood literature. Critics currently ask if emerging adulthood is applicable to all cultural groups and these same critics could similarly question if student affairs professionals' perceptions of emerging adulthood apply to all members of the profession.

Other noteworthy aspects of the demographic profile of this study's respondents in light of the conceptualization of emerging adulthood involve median age, level of education, marital status, and parental status. A key component of this investigation was the influence that generational status had on student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood. Therefore, demographics were analyzed based on generational statuses of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials.

Given the demographic aspects of emerging adulthood, the majority of the Millennial student affairs professional respondents are considered to be emerging adults. The Millennial respondents had a mean age of 26-years old which is just slightly older than the rough emerging adulthood timeframe of 18 to 25 years of age, but the emerging adult age range is dynamic with some research indicating emerging adulthood continues through the late twenties (Arnett, 2006a). Emerging adulthood is also characterized by a time of self-exploration via engagement in higher education and delaying of both marriage and childbirth (Arnett, 2006a). The Millennials in this study also fit this aspect of the profile as well as 99% had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, 65% indicated they had never been married, and only 4% had children. This created an interesting dynamic within the study as the Millennials were sharing their perceptions of emerging adulthood in relation to the students with

whom they work, but in essence, they were reflecting perceptions of themselves as from the demographic perspective, Millennial student affairs professionals are also emerging adults.

One final noteworthy aspect of the respondents' demographic profile in relation to emerging adulthood was the unique interaction that Baby Boomer respondents have with emerging adults as their children. Of the 66% of Baby Boomer respondents who had children, 84% of those children were 18 or older. Seventy-six percent of those Baby Boomer college-age children had attended college for at least one semester. For the Baby Boomers with college-age children, their perceptions of adulthood are not just informed by the professional interactions they have with the emerging adults on their campuses, but their perceptions are also colored by their experience with their children and their children's friends. The relationship of respondents' perceptions of emerging adults as family members versus respondents' perceptions of emerging adults with whom they work as student affairs professionals is not nearly as prevalent for Generation X because of the 42% of Generation Xers who have children, only 5% of those children are age 18 or older.

Student Affairs Professionals' Criteria for Adulthood

The first research question explored which criteria student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses consider important to achieve adulthood. Thirty-four criteria for adulthood that were developed by Arnett (1997) and were modified over time (Arnett, 2001, 2003; Barry & Nelson, 2005; Cheah & Nelson, 2004; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson & Barry,

2005) with the final criteria for adulthood being based on the iterations by Badger et al. (2006) and Nelson et al. (2007). The student affairs professionals were presented with these 34 criteria for adulthood and were asked to, “Please indicate your opinion on the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.”

Student affairs professionals rated “accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions,” “developing greater consideration for others,” “becoming less self-oriented,” “being financially independent from parents/guardians,” and “establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult” as the most important criteria respectively in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. “Accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions” not only had the highest mean (3.84), but also the smallest standard deviation (.46) and was followed by “develop greater consideration for others” with a mean of 3.42 ($SD = .73$) indicating that “accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions” was clearly the single-most important criterion in the eyes of student affairs professionals in determining if one has reached adulthood.

For the remaining criteria for adulthood, 26 had standard deviations that fell between .60 and .99 indicating reasonable agreement on ratings of importance amongst the student affairs professionals, but there were seven criteria whose standard deviations were between 1.02 and 1.13. These higher values indicated wider variation in ratings of importance in determining if one has reached adulthood for “avoids drunk driving,” “avoids committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting,” “avoids illegal drugs,” “if a woman, become capable of caring for

children,” “has purchased a house,” is “married/partnered,” and “has at least one child.”

The ranking of top criteria by importance for adulthood by student affairs professionals was similar to the manner in which emerging adults attending college and their parents ranked the same criteria. Nelson et al. (2007) surveyed 392 unmarried undergraduate and graduate students from five colleges and universities across the country ranging in age from 18 to 25 ($M = 19.89$, $SD = 1.78$). One or both of the emerging adult parents were also recruited for participation resulting in 271 fathers ($M_{age} = 51.24$, $SD = 5.39$) and 319 mothers ($M_{age} = 48.96$, $SD = 4.32$). The emerging adults and parents were presented with the same 34 criteria for adulthood and, as with the student affairs professionals, both groups rated “accept responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions” as the most important criteria for adulthood. For emerging adults, the next three most important criteria were: avoid drunk driving; avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting; and becoming financially independent from parents. Parents’ second through fourth most important criteria for adulthood were “avoid committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting,” “avoid drunk driving,” and “become less self-oriented and develop greater consideration for others” respectively (Nelson et al., 2007).

The responses of emerging adults and parents touched on all the same top criteria for adulthood indicated by Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial student affairs professionals (see Tables 5 and 6 from Chapter 4). Overall then, it appears that from a purely descriptive comparison perspective, there is relative agreement between emerging adults, parents of emerging adults, and student affairs

professionals regardless of generational status on the criteria that are most important in determining if a person has reached adulthood. It should be noted that for two of the common criterion – “avoids drunk driving” and “avoids committing petty crimes like vandalism and shoplifting” – there was wider variation in response amongst the student affairs professionals. Additionally, all three groups viewed aspects of the subscale of relational maturity as the most essential criteria for adulthood rather than specific events such as marriage or reaching legal age milestones of 18 or 21. This consensus of the importance of relational maturity in preparing for adulthood has practical implications in that its importance for student affairs professionals as well as emerging adults and parents “shows that this construct is capturing something of consequence” (Nelson et al., 2007, p. 671).

Criteria for adulthood by generational status.

Means comparison analysis was conducted to determine if the three generational statuses of student affairs professionals differed in their ratings of importance on the criteria for adulthood. Student affairs professionals were in agreement on their ratings of importance for two-thirds or 22 of the 34 criteria for adulthood as not significant differences were revealed by generational status. For the 12 criteria that were statistically significantly different by generational status, they grouped into three categories: Baby Boomers rating the importance of certain criteria more important than Generation Xers and Millennials; Baby Boomers rating the importance of certain criteria more important than Generation Xers; and Millennials rating the importance of certain criteria more important than Baby Boomers and Generation Xers (see Table 7).

For the seven criteria that Baby Boomers rated significantly more important than Generation Xers and Millennials, the criteria were from the family capacities and norm compliance subscales. In relation to family capacities, Baby Boomers found it more important than the other generational groups for men to be able to run a household and care for their children; for both sexes to be capable of keeping their family physically safe; to behave in a manner that avoids using profane language and becoming drunk; and to drive responsibly. Baby Boomers also felt it was more important than Generation Xers to establish equal, adult relationships with parents and to use contraception. As two-thirds of the Baby Boomers in this investigation have their own children, perhaps these results reflect that Baby Boomers are particularly attuned to the optimal environmental and safety conditions for child rearing. Baby Boomers having stronger opinions as to the importance of family lifestyle and norm compliance issues is reflective of findings on intergenerational relationships between older parents and their adult children (Clarke, Preston, Raskin, & Bengtson, 1999; Zhang & Lin, 2009). As compared to peer-to-peer relationships, disagreements occurred more frequently in intergenerational relationships regarding habits and lifestyles including living arrangements and sexual activity, improvements to the family living environment, and child-rearing practices involving methods or philosophy of parenting. As Baby Boomers are older and more experienced with raising families as compared to Generation Xers and Millennials, their perceptions on certain aspects of adulthood more closely match older parents whose perceptions are different than their children regardless of the children's adult status. Additionally, the notion of Baby Boomers who have emerging adult children finding it more important

to establish equal, adult relationships with parents is also supported by research on intergenerational communication in that family elders are less critical and more supportive of young people as compared to nonfamily elders. This interest being accommodative and supportive of young people in order to establish stronger relationships between parents and young adult children appears to be similar to the Baby Boomer desire for emerging adults to create strong relationships with their parents (Giles et al., 2003; Ng, Liu, Weatherall, & Loong, 1997; Zhang & Lin, 2009)

Millennials rated the importance of two biological/age transitions criteria, being allowed to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes, as significantly more important than Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. In general, all generational statuses rated these criteria to be relatively unimportant in relation to achieving adult status (allowed to drink alcohol $M = 1.67$, $SD = .83$; allowed to smoke cigarettes $M = 1.53$, $SD = .75$), but as these actions have strict legal age limits set with them that Millennial student affairs professionals have more recently achieved as compared to their Generation X and Baby Boomer counterparts, perhaps having reached the age of legally being able to smoke and drink alcohol become more salient indicators of adulthood for Millennials. Additionally, a significant proportion of student affairs professionals begin their professional careers working in residence life which is represented in this investigation with 45% of the Millennials indicating they work in residence life and housing. Residence life staff regularly and directly cope with students who have overconsumed alcohol, and they also deal with the secondary results of alcohol use in the residence hall in the form of fights, damage to residence hall property, or disruptions to other residence within the hall (Broughton & Molasso,

2006). As Millennial student affairs professionals are often the “first responders” to substance-related issues on college and university campuses, it follows that the importance of alcohol and cigarette use is more somewhat salient in the Millennials’ conceptualizations of adulthood.

Generational Influence on Student Affairs Professionals’ Views of the Emerging Adulthood Subscales

Previous investigations (Arnett, 1997, 1998; 2001; 2003; 2006a; Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) have used the emerging adulthood subscales of role transitions, norm compliance, biological/age transitions, family capacities, and relational maturity as a mechanism to organize the criteria for adulthood based on conceptual and theoretical criteria from the literature. Using the emerging adulthood subscales, researches have compared different populations’ conceptualizations of adulthood including perceived adults vs. emerging adult peers (Nelson & Barry, 2005), Chinese emerging adults vs. American emerging adults (Badger et al., 2006), and parents vs. their emerging adult children (Nelson et al., 2007). The remaining research questions in this present investigation also used the emerging adulthood subscales to examine differences amongst student affairs professionals based on generational status (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial).

For student affairs professionals as a whole, relational maturity (i.e., controlling one’s emotions, accepting responsibility for one’s actions, establishing adult relationship with parents) received the highest mean score (3.36) and therefore

was the most important subscale in student affairs professionals' conceptualization of adulthood. However, differences did not exist by generational status for relational maturity. Family capacities ($M = 2.71$) and norm compliance ($M = 2.65$) were the next most important emerging adulthood subscales following relational maturity. Norm compliance involves specific behaviors such as avoiding illegal drugs, excess use of alcohol, petty criminal behavior, and vulgar language as well as using safe sex practices and driving in a safe manner while family capacities involves traditional notions of gender roles indicating a woman or man's ability to financially support a family, run a household, keep a family physically safe and care for children. Both the family capacities and norm compliance subscales produced significantly different responses based on generational status within student affairs professionals and post hoc analysis revealed that Baby Boomers rated the importance of the family capacities and norm compliance scales higher than Generation Xers and Millennials when determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. Potential reasons for these differences were discussed in the previous section.

Student affairs professionals indicated the least important subscales in determining if an individual had reached adulthood were role transitions ($M = 2.40$) and biological/age-related factors ($M = 1.70$). Role transitions involves achieving specific transitional markers such as finishing education, getting married, purchasing a home, and having a child while biological/age-related factors are physical and age-linked transitions of reaching legal ages of 18 and 21 and thus being allowed to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes and becoming capable of bearing or fathering children. Student affairs professionals did not differ by generational status in either of these

two emerging adulthood subscales.

Pattern of Emerging Adulthood Subscale Importance

A review of the mean subscales scores of recent investigations (Badger et al., 2006; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson et al., 2007) using the emerging adulthood subscales revealed that student affairs professionals' overall order of subscale importance (with relational maturity being the most important followed by family capacities, norm compliance, role transitions, and biological/age-related factors respectively) was consistent with the patterns established by other populations. Table 11 outlines this relatively similar mean pattern. Similar to how there were significant differences for student affairs professionals by generational status for two of the emerging adulthood subscales (family capacities and norm compliance), significant differences existed within the subscales for the other populations whose perceptions of emerging adulthood have been compared (perceived adults vs. perceived emerging adults; American emerging adults vs. Chinese emerging adults; and emerging adults vs. their parents).

The most interesting observation from mean responses of all the populations that have been studied is that overall, all of the populations agreed on the relative importance of each of the subscales in determining if an individual has achieved adulthood with relational maturity being the most important followed by family capacities, norm compliance, role transitions, and biological/age-related factors. The observance of this pattern is a unique contribution to the literature as this is only the second study to examine criteria for adulthood from a perspective other than that of

Table 11
Emerging Adulthood Subscales: Mean Comparisons over Multiple Investigations

Subscale	Pickard, 2011	Nelson & Barry, 2005*		Badger et al., 2006		Nelson et al., 2007		
	Student Affairs Professionals**	Perceived Adults	Perceived Emerging Adults	American Emerging Adults	Chinese Emerging Adults	Emerging Adults	Fathers	Mothers
Relational Maturity	3.36	3.06	3.08	3.29	3.50	3.40	3.34	3.54
		Independence 2.53	Independence 2.56					
Family Capacities	2.71	Interdependence 2.89	Interdependence 2.66	2.72	2.94	3.01	3.05	3.18
Norm Compliance	2.65	2.55	2.48	2.54	2.97	2.81	3.23	3.45
Role Transitions	2.40	1.98	2.07	2.29	2.64	2.49	2.31	2.34
Biological/ Age-related Factors	1.70	2.29	2.08	2.15	2.22	1.71	1.55	1.55

*Independence and Interdependence subscales were later merged to form Relational Maturity subscales based on confirmatory factor analysis by Badger et al., 2006.

**See Table 10 for student affairs professionals means for each emerging adulthood subscale by generational status.

young people. Nelson et al. (2007) first provided insight into the parent perspective on emerging adulthood and now this study provides insight into the student affairs professional perspective on adulthood. This study was then allowed to examine all of the populations' results regarding perceptions of adulthood side-by-side and was therefore the first investigation to determine a broad pattern of importance regarding the subscales for emerging adulthood, the implications of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Summary of Student Affairs Professionals Conceptualization of Adulthood

In examining perceptions of traditional college student adulthood, student affairs professionals indicated that the most important criteria in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood are accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions, developing greater consideration for others; becoming less self-oriented, being financially independent from parents/guardians, and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult. Most of these criteria fall within the relational maturity subscale so it is not surprising then that, of the five subscales of emerging adulthood, relational maturity was rated as most important followed by family capacities, norm compliance, role transitions, and biological/age-related factors.

Overall, generational status did not result in dramatic differences in student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood when examining the concept by its subscales. Baby Boomers as compared to Generation Xers and Millennials held somewhat more strictly to the views about exercising responsible behavior in relation

use of regulated substances and lawful behaviors and emphasized creating optimal environmental and safety conditions for in relation child rearing and overall care of a family. Finally, regardless of their generational status, student affairs professionals appeared to be in agreement on their views of incoming traditional college students and graduating traditional college students as adults. For traditional undergraduate students who enter as first-time, first-year students, student affairs professionals indicated that they did not consider these individuals to be adults ($M = 2.90$ on a 5-point scale with 5 corresponding to “strongly agree” and 1 corresponding to “strongly disagree”; 46% “strongly disagree”/“disagree,” 19% “neutral,” and 35% “agree”/“strongly agree”). When considering these same traditional undergraduates graduate, the majority of student affairs professionals agreed ($M = 3.86$; 72% “agree”/“strongly agree,” 19% “neutral,” and 9% “strongly disagree”/“disagree”) that they consider these traditional students to be full-fledged adults.

Limitations

The methodological design of this investigation is not without its limitations. The items created by Arnett (1997) to measure the conceptualization of emerging adulthood are concerning in some respects. First, when Arnett originally created his items, he did so based on theoretical groupings of the subscales rather than relying on relying on factor analysis to provide the subscale groupings. Additionally, the items that comprised the family capacities subscale are extremely traditional in their assignment of specific roles to men and women. For example, one item states, “If a woman, become capable of supporting a family financially” while another states, “If a

man, become capable of running a household.” One might question why these gender labels are added to the front of these statements and in general, why gender labels need to be placed in front of any of the statements. The gender labels imply that there may be different adulthood criteria for men and women, which is not discussed within Arnett’s conceptual framework.

Another concern related to the items was the relational maturity scale developed by Badger et al. (2006) and utilized by Nelson et al. (2007) that had weak internal reliability. The internal reliabilities on the relational maturity subscale for these two studies ranged from .57 - .67. As internal reliability reflects the extent to which a measure is consistent within itself, these Cronbach alpha levels were problematic. The relational maturity scale was created by combining items from Arnett’s (1997) original subscales on interdependence and independence whose internal reliabilities ranged from .64-.67 and .35-.70 respectively. While the creation relational maturity subscale helped to improve the overall emerging adulthood model, it was still considered to be a weak subscale. Fortunately, this investigation produced an internal reliability of .80 for the overall relational maturity subscale.

In an ideal research situation, the issues discussed above with the three subscales would be addressed through refinement of the subscales prior to administration of the instrument to the student affairs professionals. But given that this population has never been studied in relation to their conceptualization of emerging adulthood, the researcher was leery to make significant changes to the subscales that would have made direct comparison to the studies previously conducted utilizing the original subscales impossible. Given the exploratory nature of

this investigation, it was deemed prudent to use the original items created by Arnett (1997) and employ modifications in future investigations.

A limitation discovered during the administration of the Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood Survey was that a few respondents indicated they were confused by the question stem that preceded the criteria for adulthood. The stem stated, "Please indicate your opinion on the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood." Two respondents sent emails indicating they were unsure if the stem meant that an individual is more likely to be an adult if they have experienced the specific criterion or an individual is less likely to be an adult until they have experienced the specific criterion. While the number of respondents who made the effort to contact the researcher was small, their effort indicates that other respondents may have experienced similar confusion, so in future investigations, the stem wording should be reconsidered and pilot tested prior to administration.

During the statistical analysis of the research questions, another limitation was discovered. The first research question asked what criteria student affairs professionals of varying generational statuses consider important to achieve adulthood and was analyzed by using one-way analyses of variance to determine if significant differences existed by generational status on the 34 criteria for adulthood. Because such a large number of cells were being evaluated, the Bonferroni approach was used to guard against capitalization on chance or control for Type I error. This approach splices the alpha level of .05 by the number of tests. In this case, we had three generational categories, so the alpha level of .05 was divided by 3 resulting in

the adoption of a two-tailed Bonferroni alpha level of .017. The results using the Bonferroni correction were the same as when Tukey HSD post hoc procedures alone were performed indicating that Type I error was accounted for properly.

Another potential limitation was the use of generational status as a framework for grouping and comparing student affairs professionals. As generational frameworks have been criticized as being based on generalizations, lacking in rigorous evidence for their assertions, and questioned as to if they represent the experience of people of color (Brooks, 200; Fogarty, 2008; Hoover, 2007, 2009), future research attempting to compare individuals within the profession of student affairs might consider if there are demographics that combined might provide even more meaningful ways to categorize and compare these professionals.

One final limitation of this study was the lack of representation of student affairs professionals by ethnicity. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the lack of ethnic diversity in the literature on emerging adults has been a primary critique of this conceptualization (Arnett, Hendry, Kloep, & Tanner, 2011; Côté & Bynner, 2008; Hendry & Kloep, 2007). Cheah and Nelson (2004) emphasized the need to examine acculturation in the transition to adulthood to determine if emerging adults identify more with the larger culture in relation to the criteria they deem important for adulthood or if their culture of origin has a greater effect on how they determine important criteria for adulthood. This argument is relevant to all groups that are examined in relation emerging adulthood because if one population endorses criteria for adulthood that are deemed more or less important to another population because of cultural values, the incongruence could have significant implications on

population-to-population dynamics (Nelson et al., 2007). To improve future studies of student affairs professionals specifically, response rates of professionals of color from past investigations should be examined. If the respondents are consistently lacking in racial/ethnic representation, investigators should consider oversampling professionals of color during the data collection process or weighting the responses of professionals of color as appropriate during the data analysis phase.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings from this exploratory investigation of student affairs professionals' conceptualization of adulthood provided a number of implications for professional practice as well as directions for future research. First, as was previously mentioned in this chapter, this investigation offered the inaugural examination of student affairs professionals' criteria for adulthood and one of the first comparisons of those results to emerging adult perceptions of adulthood as well as to parental views of adulthood. While it appears that the three populations - emerging adults, parents of emerging adults, and student affairs professionals - have reached relative consensus on the importance of criteria for adulthood, recent research implies that when traditional college students graduate neither they nor their parents believe they are adolescents yet they still are not quite adults (Nelson et al., 2007). Instead, graduation from college is a significant achievement in the process of moving through emerging adulthood to adulthood, but it is not a defining marker in and of itself (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005).

This investigation revealed though that while student affairs professionals'

criteria for adulthood are similar to those of traditional college students and parents, student affairs professionals' timeline for adulthood is abbreviated as they believe that most traditional students are adults upon graduation from college. These findings reveal a significant disconnect in the perceptions of student affairs professionals compared to traditional college students and their parents as to when adulthood is actually achieved. The source of these binary viewpoints may stem from the policies, laws, and social practices that consider traditional college students to adults in certain contexts while in other contexts, the same students are considered to be children or adolescents.

Currently, institutions of higher education operate under the assumption that traditional students are adults (Nuss, 2003; Taub, 2008). This mindset evolved as a result of numerous legal actions and policy shifts that occurred starting in the 1960s and 1970s including colleges and universities moving away from the model of *in loco parentis* or acting in place of the parent (Bowden, 2007; Wartman & Savage, 2008); the 1971 ratification of the 26th amendment to the Constitution that standardized the legal voting age in the United States to eighteen years of age; the 1974 enactment of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) which restricted universities from disclosing educational record information (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g [1974]); and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) which provided individuals aged 18 or older substantial protection regarding the use and disclosure of their medical information. Additionally, traditional college students have the ability to vote, enlist in the military, drive, and establish credit cards in their own name regardless of if they have

an income. Combined, these laws, policies, and societal factors have afforded traditional college students many “adult rights” and privileges which seem to have resulted in student affairs professionals being socialized to believe that traditional students are adults at the time of graduation.

Simultaneously though, traditional college students are still treated as “less than adults” for much of their college experience and even after they have graduated in that they are unable to legally drink until they reach age twenty-one, must report their parents’ income on their financial aid forms, are eligible to stay on their parents’ health insurance until their mid-twenties, and cannot rent a car until they are twenty-five. Additionally, today’s students have been raised in a K-12 environment that has encouraged ongoing parental and family involvement in their education as these behaviors have been linked to positive student outcomes such as higher grades, success in school, higher standardized test scores, higher self-esteem, greater social competence, aspirations for college, and enrollment in college (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 played a significant role in these students’ K-12 education with a key component of the framework being well-defined parental involvement behaviors (Carney-Hall, 2008; Wartman & Savage, 2008). If traditional students and their parents have been socialized throughout the K-12 years to be actively engaging with one another, then it logically follows that students will expect familial involvement to continue throughout the college years.

Yet when traditional students arrive on college campuses, they encounter a new set of expectations which establishes a direct student-institutional relationship

and parents are shepherded into a “partner” role rather than being granted their accustomed direct access to their student’s information (Carney-Hall, 2008; Coburn, 2006; Keppler, Mullendore, & Carey, 2005; Wartman & Savage, 2008). While parents and administrators alike expect traditional students to develop independence at some point, this abrupt shift in roles can create friction between students, parents, and administrators if the institution does not clearly define their expectations for student and parent behavior (Wartman & Savage, 2008). But are the expectations of the student affairs professionals and higher education as a whole realistic given current shifts in demographic, social, and economic conditions which have allowed traditional college students and their parents to begin operating under the new conceptualization of emerging adulthood?

College students change as society changes (King, 1994) and the development of theories to explain these changes is a constantly evolving and dynamic process (McEwan, 2005). The current, primary beliefs about the nature of a particular subject reflect the dominant paradigm, but when a shift occurs in which the understanding of that subject is markedly altered, the dominant paradigm gives way to an emerging paradigm. “With different or changing beliefs and assumptions now at the core of people’s understanding of reality, new theories are developed” (McEwan, 2005, p. 16). The conceptualization of emerging adulthood is a new theory that has not been broadly discussed amongst student affairs professionals but should be addressed in light of the current literature and the results of this investigation that highlight the disconnect student affairs professionals appear to have between their criteria for adulthood and their expectations of when these criteria should be achieved. Student affairs professionals

need to ask themselves why they find it acceptable for traditional college students to make gains in cognitive, moral, and multicultural development during the college years yet expect further development to continue beyond graduation, but simultaneously they expect the psychosocial transition to adulthood to be complete at by the time a student graduates from college?

A paradigm shift appears to be occurring in relation to the transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood to adulthood that student affairs professionals need to take time to consider in relation to their relationships with students and parents and the policies and programs they enact in the higher education milieu. Perhaps it is time to clearly define the outcomes related to achieving adulthood including developing independence through increased responsibility, management of personal finances, and establishment of equal relationships with parents. Currently, chief academic officers across the nation acknowledge that while higher education institutions are focusing on common sets of intended learning outcomes, there is still a significant lack of understanding of these goals among many students (Hart Research Associates, 2009). As upper-level higher education administrators grapple with the best way to communicate learning expectations, it is appropriate that these same institutional decision and policy makers consider articulating related developmental outcomes and expectations related to the achievement of adulthood. Additionally, student affairs professionals and higher education administrators in general need to recognize and publically acknowledge that while students may not fully achieve adulthood by the end of their college years, they can actively develop skills and relationships to move them along the continuum toward adulthood.

Given the broad-based implications presented by this research, areas of future research involve further exploration of student affairs professionals' assumptions and expectations surrounding the conceptualization of emerging adulthood. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, some significant differences in student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood may have occurred between Baby Boomers and other generational statuses because Baby Boomers have children who are old enough to attend college. Generation Xers were the largest group of professionals within this investigation's sample yet only a very small percentage of Generation X parents have children old enough to be in college. As Generation X's children age into emerging adulthood and begin entering college, will Generation X's views of adulthood shift? Will they still believe that traditional students graduating from college are adults or will they view the entire group of traditional college students from a different perspective given their parental experiences?

Another interesting area for future research would involve examining Millennial student affairs professionals' perceptions of themselves as adults. The parameters of emerging adulthood include Millennials, so asking them to rate themselves in relation to the criteria for adulthood could provide additional insight into the results of the current investigation. Would the conclusion drawn in this study that traditional college students are adults at the time of graduation be debunked if Millennial student affairs professionals indicate that they do not perceive of themselves as adults? Or if the majority of Millennial student affairs professionals believe they have indeed achieved adulthood, how would those results be interpreted in light of the conceptualization of adulthood as a whole?

Finally, emerging adulthood has been criticized for not always being representative of perspectives outside of the White, middle class experience. This investigation was lacking in representation of professionals of color so attempting to examine student affairs' professionals perspectives given representative samples based on race as well as socioeconomic status would be advantageous in providing a holistic picture of student affairs professionals' perceptions of adulthood.

Conclusion

The current study was an exploratory examination of student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood. Using Arnett's (1997; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2006a) conceptualization of emerging adulthood, the criteria that student affairs professionals consider most important to achieve adulthood were examined and the influence of generational status (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) on student affairs professionals' conceptualizations of adulthood were explored.

Results revealed that of the 34 criteria for adulthood, student affairs professionals rated "accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions," "developing greater consideration for others," "becoming less self-oriented," "being financially independent from parents/guardians," and "establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult" as the most important criteria respectively in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. When examining the importance of specific criteria by generational status, student affairs professionals were in agreement on their ratings of importance for two-thirds or 22 of the 34 criteria for

adulthood as no significant differences were revealed by generational status. For the 12 criteria that were statistically significantly different by generational status, Baby Boomers found it more important than the other generational groups for men to be able to run a household and care for their children; for both sexes to be capable of keeping their family physically safe; to behave in a manner that avoids using profane language and becoming drunk; and to drive responsibly. Baby Boomers also felt it was more important than Generation Xers to establish equal, adult relationships with parents and to use contraception. Finally, Millennials rated the importance of being allowed to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes as more important than Baby Boomers and Generation Xers.

The 34 criteria for adulthood were also been grouped into five subscales and student affairs professionals rated relational maturity as most important followed by family capacities, norm compliance, role transitions, and biological/age transitions respectively. Both the family capacities and norm compliance subscales produced significantly different responses based on generational status as Baby Boomers rated the importance of the family capacities and norm compliance as more important than Generation Xers and Millennials when determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood. The overall order of subscale importance for student affairs professionals was consistent with patterns established by other populations whose perceptions of emerging adulthood have been compared (perceived adults vs. perceived emerging adults; American emerging adults vs. Chinese emerging adults; and emerging adults vs. their parents).

Limitations of the study were discussed including concerns regarding some of

the scale items' wording, internal reliability of the subscales, the potential of Type I error, and the lack of representation of student affairs professionals of color in the sample. Finally, implications for practice in student affairs and higher education as a whole were discussed and areas of future research were suggested.

Appendix A: Initial Invitation Email to Participants from NASPA Membership

From: Jen Meyers
Subject: Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood
Survey for doctoral research
Reply: jmmeyers@umd.edu

Dear Student Affairs Professional,

You have been randomly selected from the NASPA membership to participate in a study examining student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Your participation is truly appreciated as this investigation is serving as the basis of my dissertation and is the final step in the completion of my doctorate in College Student Personnel at the University of Maryland.

You should be able to complete the anonymous survey in 10 minutes. To access the survey please click [here](#). If the survey does not open automatically, please copy and paste the following link to your internet browser's address bar:

<http://www.studentvoice.com/p/?uuid=44e6a6e4d81d408f93a1b85af8f4bdf1&p=1>

Those who complete the survey will be given an opportunity to provide their name and e-mail address to enter a drawing to receive one of four \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

Thank you in advance for taking time out of your very busy schedule to assist me with my dissertation research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jmmeyers@umd.edu or 773.991.2285.

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Jen Meyers
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education
University of Maryland

and

Dr. Susan R. Komives
Professor, College Student Personnel Program
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education
University of Maryland

Appendix B: Initial Invitation Email to Participants from ACPA Membership

From: Jen Meyers
Subject: Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood
Survey for doctoral research
Reply: jmmeyers@umd.edu

Dear Student Affairs Professional,

You have been randomly selected from the ACPA – College Student Educators International membership to participate in a study examining student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Your participation is truly appreciated as this investigation is serving as the basis of my dissertation and is the final step in the completion of my doctorate in College Student Personnel at the University of Maryland.

You should be able to complete the anonymous survey in 10 minutes. To access the survey please click [here](#). If the survey does not open automatically, please copy and paste the following link to your internet browser's address bar:

<http://www.studentvoice.com/p/?uuid=a1f5fa4365a346238012812cf292578a&p=1>

Those who complete the survey will be given an opportunity to provide their name and e-mail address to enter a drawing to receive one of four \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

Thank you in advance for taking time out of your very busy schedule to assist me with my dissertation research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jmmeyers@umd.edu or 773.991.2285.

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Jen Meyers
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education
University of Maryland

and

Dr. Susan R. Komives
Professor, College Student Personnel Program
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education

University of Maryland

**This is an ACPA - College Student Educators International-approved survey. If you have any questions, please contact Vernon A. Wall, Director of Educational Programs & Publications at vwall@acpa.nche.edu.

**Appendix C: Follow-up Invitation Email to Participants from NASPA
Membership**

From: Jen Meyers

Subject: Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood
Survey for doctoral research

Reply: jmmeyers@umd.edu

Dear Student Affairs Professional,

You have been randomly selected from the NASPA membership to participate in a study examining student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood utilizing the theoretical conceptualization of emerging adulthood. Your participation is truly appreciated as this investigation is serving as the basis of my dissertation and is the final step in the completion of my doctorate in College Student Personnel at the University of Maryland.

You should be able to complete the anonymous survey in 10 minutes. To access the survey please click [here](#). If the survey does not open automatically, please copy and paste the following link to your internet browser's address bar:

<http://www.studentvoice.com/p/?uuid=44e6a6e4d81d408f93a1b85af8f4bdf1&p=1>

Those who complete the survey will be given an opportunity to provide their name and e-mail address to enter a drawing to receive one of four \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

Thank you in advance for taking time out of your very busy schedule to assist me with my dissertation research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jmmeyers@umd.edu or 773.991.2285.

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Jen Meyers
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education
University of Maryland

and

Dr. Susan R. Komives
Professor, College Student Personnel Program
Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education
University of Maryland

**Appendix D: Follow-up Invitation Email to Participants from ACPA
Membership**

From: Jen Meyers

Subject: Reminder to complete the Student Affairs Professionals' Perceptions of the
Transition to Adulthood Survey

Reply: jmmeyers@umd.edu

Dear Student Affairs Professional,

I recently contacted you concerning my doctoral dissertation study examining student affairs professionals' perceptions of traditional college student adulthood. There is still time to participate as the survey will close on Tuesday, October 12th.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. To access the survey please click [here](#). If the survey does not open automatically, please copy and paste the following link to your internet browser's address bar:

<http://www.studentvoice.com/p/?uuid=a1f5fa4365a346238012812cf292578a&p=1>

Those who complete the survey will be given an opportunity to provide their name and e-mail address to enter a drawing to receive one of four \$25 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

Thank you in advance for taking time out of your very busy schedule to assist me with my dissertation research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jmmeyers@umd.edu or 773.991.2285.

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Jen Meyers

Doctoral Candidate

Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education

University of Maryland

and

Dr. Susan R. Komives

Professor, College Student Personnel Program

Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education

University of Maryland

****This is an ACPA - College Student Educators International-approved survey. If**

you have any questions, please contact Vernon A. Wall, Director of Educational Programs & Publications at vwall@acpa.nche.edu.

Appendix E: IRB Approval Email



Initial Application Approval Notification

To: Principal Investigator, Dr. Susan R. Komives, Counseling and Personnel Services
Student, Jennifer Meyers, Counseling and Personnel Services

From: James M. Hagberg
IRB Co-Chair
University of Maryland College Park

Re: IRB Protocol: 10-0395 - An exploratory study of student affairs professionals' conceptualization of adulthood

Approval Date: July 19, 2010

Expiration Date: July 19, 2013

Application: Initial

Review Path: Exempt

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office approved your Initial IRB Application. This transaction was approved in accordance with the University's IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please reference the above-cited IRB Protocol number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document will be sent via mail. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please note that research participants must sign a stamped version of the informed consent form and receive a copy.

Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, beyond the expiration date of this protocol, you must [submit a Renewal Application](#) to the IRB Office 45 days prior to the expiration date. If IRB Approval of your protocol expires, all human subject research activities including enrollment of new subjects, data collection and analysis of identifiable, private information must cease until the

Renewal Application is approved. If work on the human subject portion of your project is complete and you wish to close the protocol, please [submit a Closure Report](#) to irb@umd.edu.

Modifications: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the subjects. If you would like to modify an approved protocol, please [submit an Addendum request](#) to the IRB Office.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or jsmith@umresearch.umd.edu

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns. Email: irb@umd.edu

The UMCP IRB is organized and operated according to guidelines of the United States Office for Human Research Protections and the United States Code of Federal Regulations and operates under Federal Wide Assurance No. FWA00005856.

0101 Lee Building
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
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