



Supporting Transitions: Secondary to Post-Secondary and Beyond

AASK Biennial Conference: November 2017

Agenda

- Transitions – What do we mean?
- Theories and a Multi-theoretical approach
- Exploring the theory of Emergent Adulthood
- Implications
 - for Post-secondary Education
 - for Transitions
 - for Advisors
- Round table discussion

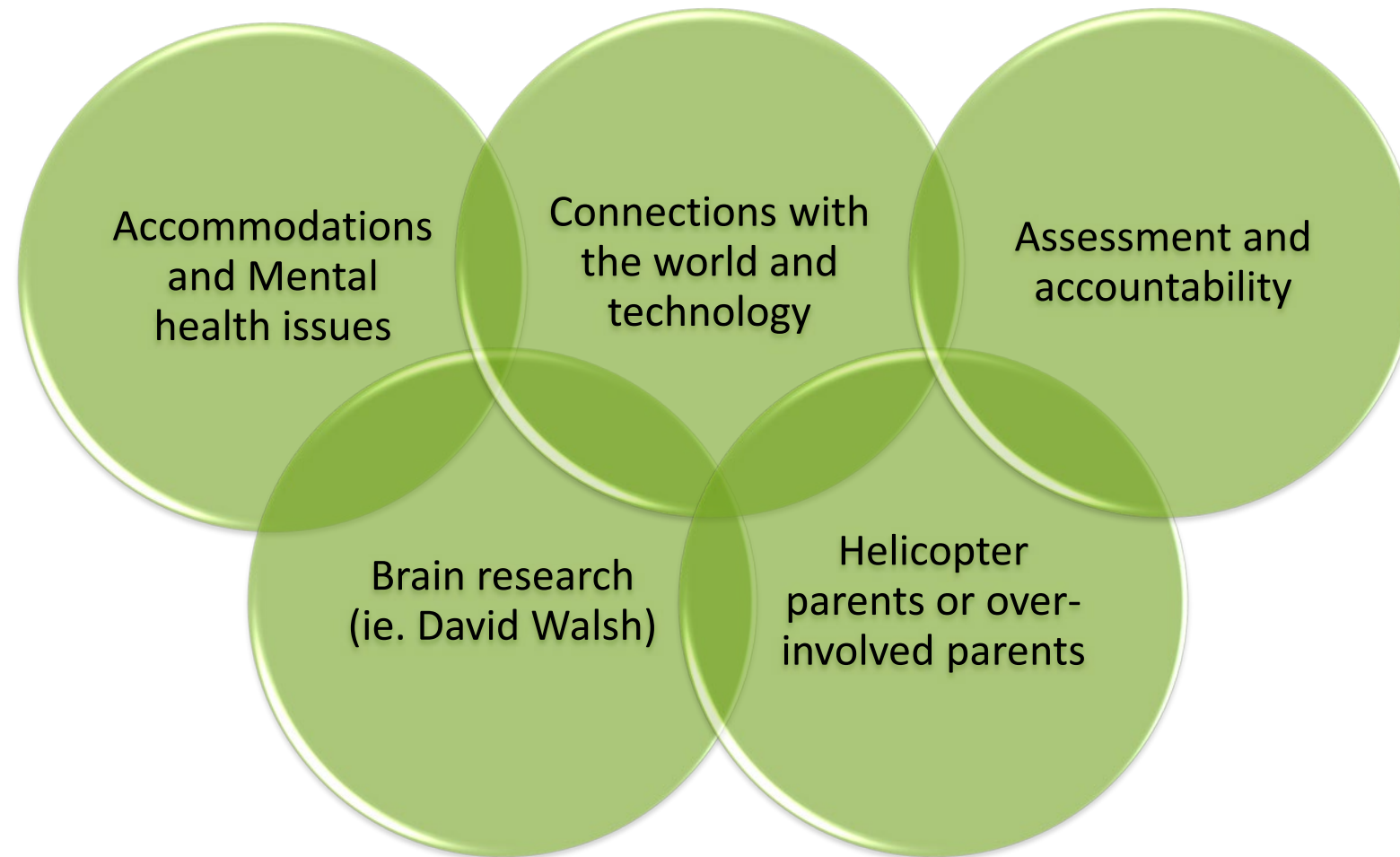
My background

- K – 12 education:
Classroom and resource
teacher and administrator
- My own transition to post-
secondary, first
administration and then
academics
- Establishing a program for
leadership in post-
secondary education
- A parent



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Emergent trends – K - 12



Student success

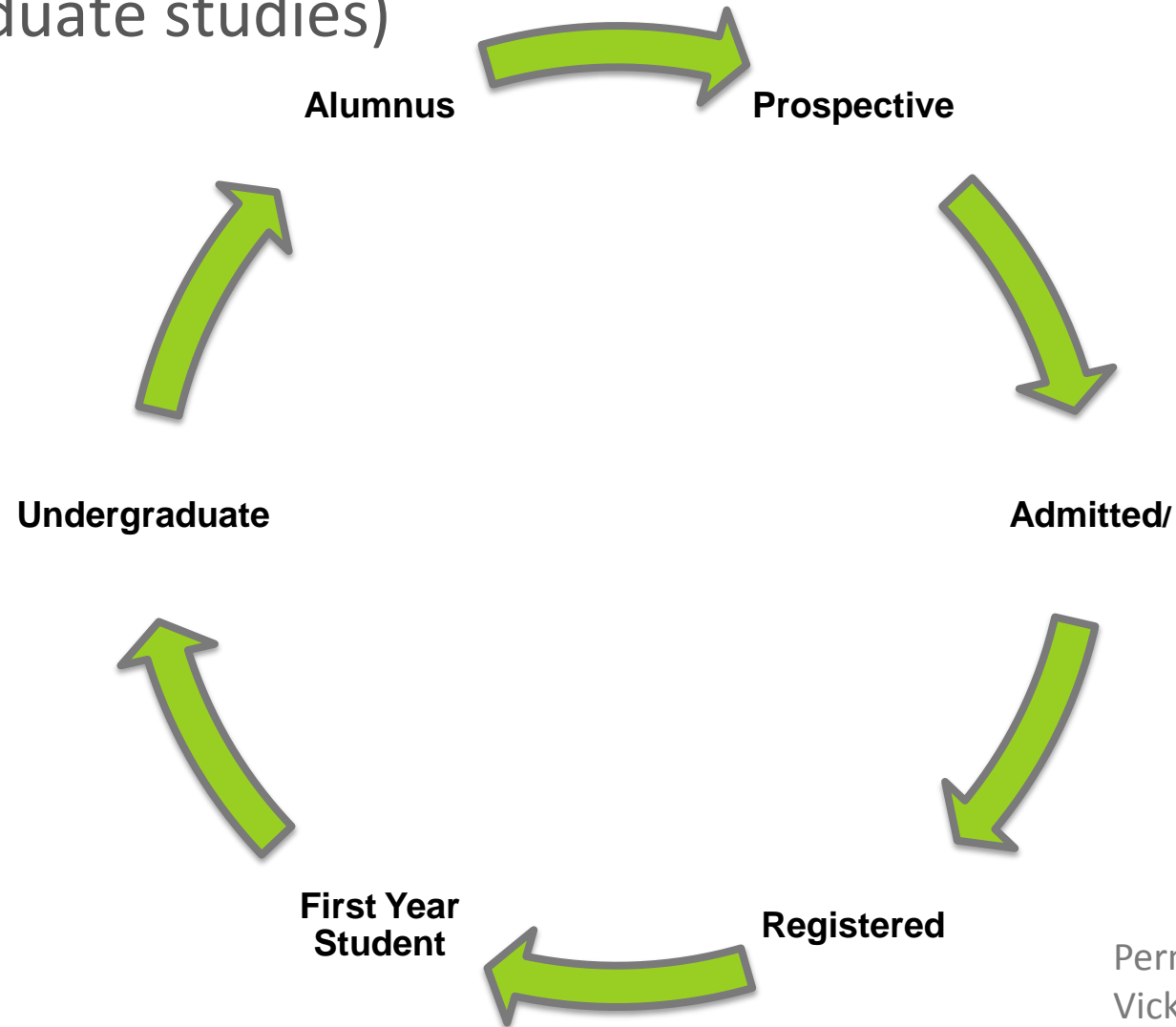
- Post-secondary student success as my area of research
- Multi-faceted:
 - Academic program
 - Goal motivation
 - Personal demographics
 - Personal supports
 - Academic supports
 - Student well-being

Transitions are critical in student success

Framing transitions

- What do we mean by transitions?
- Within this context, transitions include:
 - a) A passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another :[change](#)
 - b) A movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another (Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition>)
- Preparations for transitions and support during the multiple transitions are necessary
- Personal and academic supports are key across these transitions

Student Lifecycle (that repeats when they return for graduate studies)



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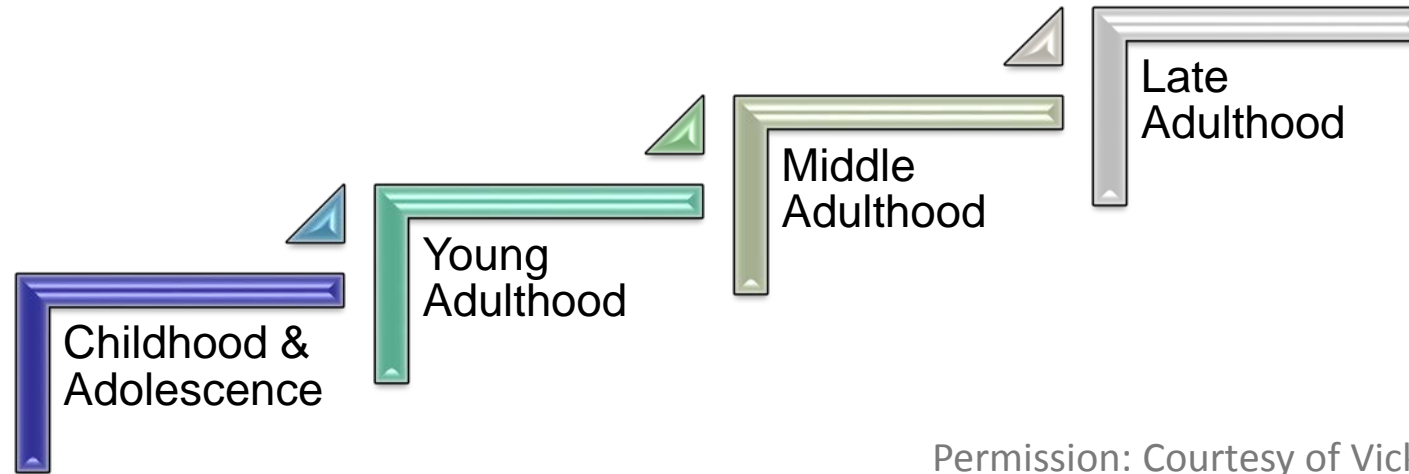
Using Theory to Understand Transitions

- Theories are useful for organizing and describing people's experiences, predicting future behaviours, and understanding how to create conditions that can influence people's lives
- Theories evolve or are discarded over time as they are found inadequate in their explanatory or predictive powers
- Some researchers argue that a multi-theoretical approach is a better way to explain the complexities of human behaviour

Theoretical Connections to Transition

- There are bodies of literature on each of these connections:
- Learning theory
- Student development
- First year student success
- Retention and persistence
- Grit
- Motivation and goals

Eras (Levinson & Levinson, 1996)



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- The developmental work of each period commences, culminates and forms a point of transition for the next
- Transition points can be most problematic/dynamic
- The time preceding and following the transition can be a period of stability

Another Layer – An Emerging Theory

- J. J. Arnett is one of the leading theorists on development of young adults
- In the mid 1990s, Arnett examined emergent trends of 18 – 29 year olds in the United States over the last 50 years and concluded that the “road to adulthood” was much longer now overall
- So many social and political changes have occurred within the last 5 decades that the point of reaching adulthood has shifted

Emerging Adulthood

- He started publishing in the mid 1990s but his first publication where he introduced and defined the concept of Emerging Adulthood was in 2000, *Emerging Adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties* as an article in *American Psychologist*
- Published a series of articles and books, and has several You Tube videos describing key features of emergent adulthood and the changing socio-political climate that underlies those changes



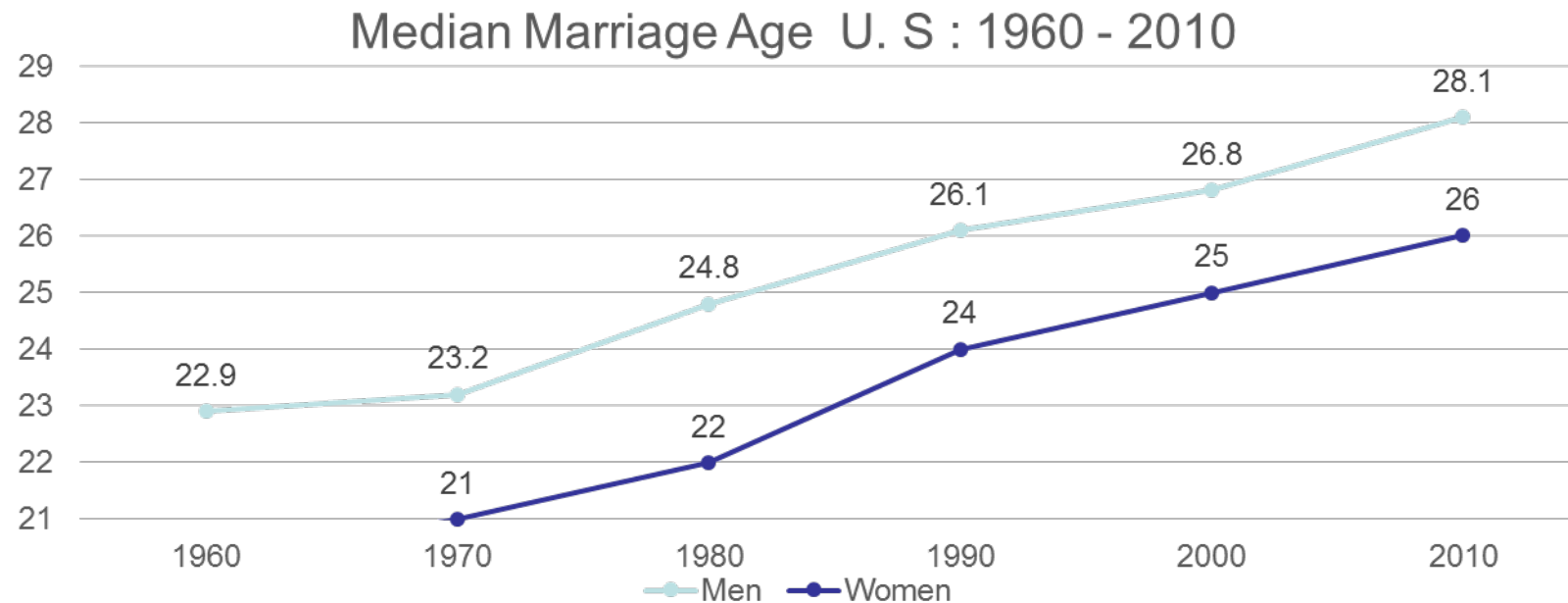
Source: <http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/about.html>

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Situating Emergent Adulthood

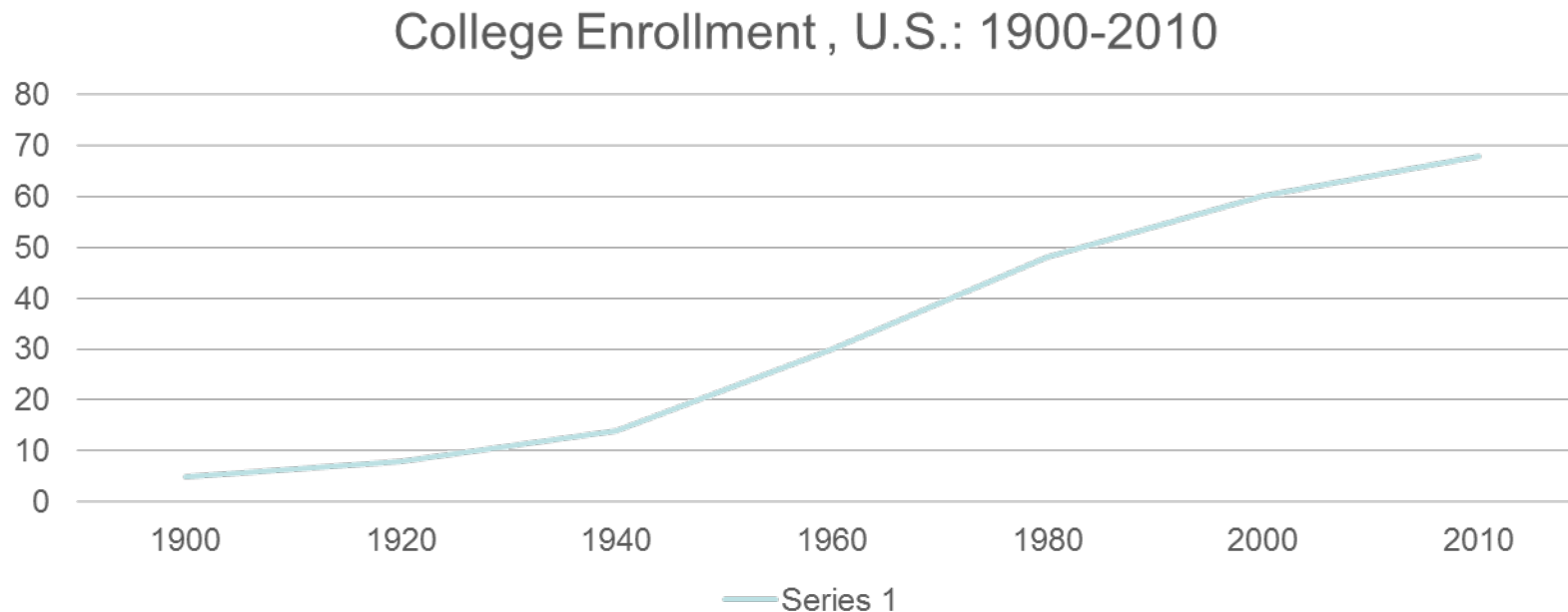
- *“Emerging Adulthood can be said to exist wherever there is a gap of at least several years between the time young people finish secondary school and the time they enter stable adult roles in love and work”* (Arnett, 2015, p. 26)
- Arnett (2014) suggested that these stages are more prevalent in developed countries where there are not as many pressures for young people to join the adult world prematurely

Median Marriage Age



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College Enrollment



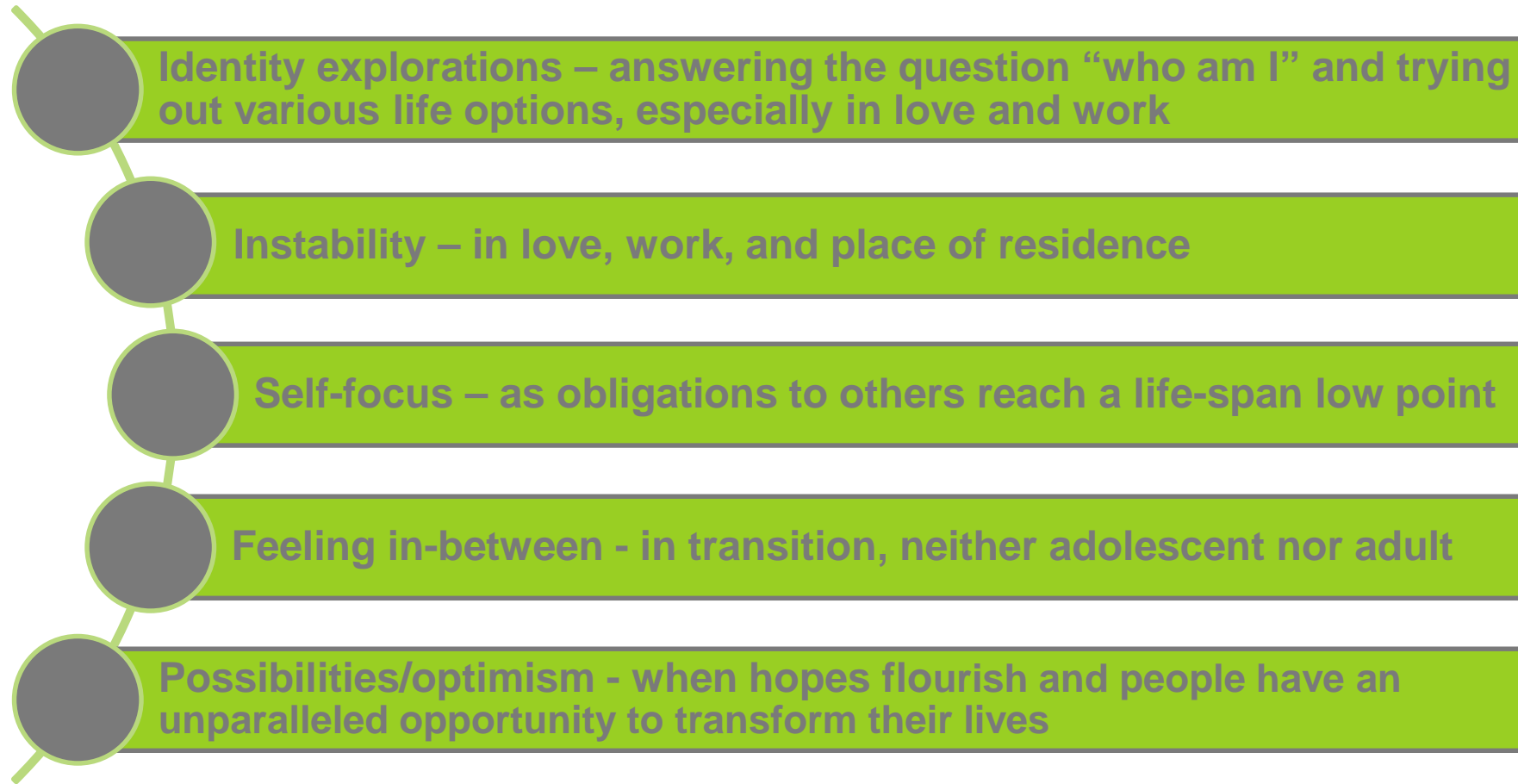
Permission: Courtesy of Vicki Squires, based on Arnett & Taber, and National Center for Education Statistics, as cited by Arnett, 2015, p. 5

The Stage of Emergent Adulthood

- Arnett (2015) suggested that this stage encompasses the ages of 18 – 28 years old
- However, the characteristics he described are not universal features that apply to all people in this age bracket
- Individual circumstances will affect movement into and out of this stage
- Some people may not spend much, if any, time at this stage, and transition directly into adulthood

Characteristics of Emergent Adulthood

(Arnett, 2015, p. 9)



Identity Explorations



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- Students in adolescence begin thinking about careers and life goals, and relationships
- In emergent adulthood, people begin an intensive period of beginning to pursue career paths, or enter the world of work
- Relationships, including friendships and partnerships, are paramount.
- Some are very serious, others are less intense

Instability

- The choices made in love and work are shifting
- This instability is connected to identity exploration
- People are unstable in terms of work situations, love and relationships, career choices, educational choices, and even places of residence



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Self-focused



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- This period is a time where people have the least restrictions and responsibilities
- Generally, they are focused on their own goals and do not need to “look after” others
- They often have left home and do not live under other people’s rules
- This self-focus is normal, and healthy – it allows people the room to make their own choices and pursue their goals without including needs of others

Feeling in-between

- People feel that they are starting to make adult decisions, yet they are not fully settled into the role of adult
- In studies across the US, people have identified the following three criteria as indicative of adulthood:
 - a) Accept responsibility for yourself.
 - b) Make independent decisions.
 - c) Become financially independent (Arnett, 2015, p. 15)
- They may be on their way, but have not fully achieved these milestones



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Possibilities/optimism

- They struggle now but they believe the future is bright – they still believe in their dreams even if there is instability at the moment
- Many feel they are starting a stage of unparalleled choices and opportunities
- Their goals are aligned around their own happiness, but many of them are still optimistic that they can help to build a better future for their families and for the communities, and even the broader global community



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Contradictions with Millennial stereotypes

- Arnett (2015) argued that self-focused does not necessarily mean self-absorbed
- He contended that many are very hard-working and concerned about their role in the world and improving the world
- He explained that emerging adults are skilled at maintaining contradictory emotions – they are confident while being wary, and optimistic in the face of large degrees of uncertainty

How do we apply this theory?

- Understanding student development using this framework can provide us with deeper insight into what the challenge or barrier may be, and what the appropriate support may be
- Using this knowledge, develop some possible resources including conversation starters with the students and including the institutional and personal supports available on campus and in the community

Implications for Post-secondary Education

- Students bring different types of background experiences, including adult-level decision making and problem solving skills
- They need more support in developing those skills
- PSE institutions need to examine the constellation of personal and academic supports

Implications for Transitions

- We need continued dialogue among the levels of education
- Secondary schools need to establish expectations that are realistic
- PSE institutions need to examine the classroom experience and address the gaps in the different classroom experiences
- Stronger connections between K – 12 and post-secondary need to be established = how?

Round table discussion

- How does the theory of emergent adulthood align with your experience or professional development? How are they different?
- What parts do not align? What are the discrepancies?
- How do you work with students who are transitioning into PSE but have transitioned into adulthood already?
- What are the implications of this theory for your work as academic advisors?
- Write at least one 'aha' moment or connection on the paper provided to share with the audience

Implications for Academic Advisors

- Navigating the system: Academic Advisors can guide students through the process
- In other words, academic advisors have the ‘map’ that can help frame the exploration of the student lifecycle using the lens of emerging adulthood



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In closing

- *Academic advisors are in a unique position of understanding the development of students, the transitions required, the institutional supports available, and the necessity of connecting students to the supports*
- Leverage the intellectual, social, political and institutional capital that you can provide to support student success.

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