Flourishing and floundering students: Implications for identification and engagement

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Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience
San Antonio
February 2012
Background research on flourishing and floundering
Today’s Emerging Adults….

Are we raising a nation of little egomaniacs?

"failed adults"

Failure to Launch

Have We Raised A Generation Of Narcissists?

Selfish!?!?

Living in the Age of Entitlement

"Young People Today Take Longer To Grow Up!"
Findings from
Project READY
(Researching Emerging Adults Developmental Years)
Our research and work from other labs are starting to suggest that some young people may be floundering during this time period while others appear to be flourishing. While there is great diversity of individual experiences in emerging adulthood, few empirical attempts have been made to investigate whether the diversity of individual experiences may still be captured in broader typologies or clusters of experiences in emerging adulthood.
Current Study

The first purpose of this study was to identify different clusters of emerging adults based on the following beliefs, behaviors, and relationships:

- parental closeness
- religious faith
- pro-social behaviors
- internal regulation of values
- drinking
- drug use
- number of sexual partners
- pornography use
- video game use
- depression
- anxiety
- self-perceptions
The second purpose of this study was to see if these clusters were differentially related to the criteria young people deemed important for adulthood and the extent of identity achievement.
Methods and Procedures

- 487 single emerging adults (281 young women, 206 young men) from four universities across the US
- $M$ age = 20.07 (SD = 1.89, range = 18-26)
- 75% European American
- 90% living outside of their parents’ home
- On-line questionnaire, recruited through faculty announcement in classes
Results

Cluster 1 \((n = 91, 20\%)\) will be referred to as *Externalizing* because it consists of emerging adults with high levels of drinking, drug use, sexual partners, pornography use, and video game use.

Cluster 2 \((n = 117, 25\%)\) will be referred to as *Internalizing* because it consists of emerging adults with high levels of depression and anxiety, and low levels of self-worth and social acceptance.

Cluster 3 \((n = 112, 24\%)\) will be referred to as *Religious-Adjusted* because it consists of emerging adults with high levels of religiosity, low levels of risk behaviors, and average depression, anxiety, and self-worth.

Cluster 4 \((n = 146, 31\%)\) will be referred to as *Well-Adjusted* because it consists of emerging adults with the highest levels of closeness to mother and father, high internal regulation of values, low levels of depression and anxiety, and high levels of self-worth and social acceptance.
Gender:
- 39% \((n = 76)\) of young men in the sample and only 6% \((n = 15)\) of young women comprised the Externalizing cluster.

- 25% \((n = 46)\) of young men and 25% \((n = 68)\) young women comprised the Internalized cluster.

- Only 7% \((n = 14)\) of young men comprised the *Religious-Adjusted* cluster, but 36% \((n = 98)\) of young women were in this cluster.

- 29% \((n = 56)\) of young men and 33% \((n = 90)\) of young women comprised the Well-adjusted cluster.
Comparing the Clusters.....

Importance of Criteria for Adulthood

In order to assess criteria for adulthood, emerging adults were presented with a list of possible criteria for adulthood (e.g., “finishing education,” “avoid drunk driving,” “purchasing a house”; Arnett, 1997, 2003).

Participants were asked to “give your opinion on the importance of each of the following in determining whether or not a person has reached adulthood.” They could rate each item on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important).

The subscales included:

- **Relational Maturity** ($\alpha = .63$, 4-items, e.g., become less self-oriented, develop greater consideration for others)
- **Role Transitions** ($\alpha = .80$, 7-items, e.g., financially independent from parents)
- **Norm Compliance** ($\alpha = .82$, 8-items, e.g., avoid becoming drunk)
- **Biological/Age Related Transitions** ($\alpha = .79$, 9-items, e.g., reach age 21)
- **Family Capacities** ($\alpha = .91$, 6-items, become capable of caring for children)
Comparing the Clusters.....

Identity Achievement

Identity achievement was assessed using a shortened version of the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995), which considers 20 statements regarding individuals’ commitment and exploration on various aspects of identity, including:

- **Occupation** (4-items, e.g., I have definitely decided on the occupation I want to pursue)
- **Religion** (4-items, e.g., I have considered adopting different kinds of religious beliefs)
- **Values** (4-items, e.g., I am not sure that the values I hold are right for me)
- **Family** (4-items, e.g., I have evaluated many ways in which I fit into my family structure)
- **Dating** (4-items, e.g., I have engaged in several discussions concerning behaviors involved in dating relationships).

Participants rated each statement on a 6-point scale with values ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Scoring was reversed for negatively-worded items, and item scores were summed to obtain total scores for identity achievement, with higher scores indicating higher exploration and commitment (i.e., higher identity achievement).
Results
Differences in outcome variables as a function of cluster membership

• Well-adjusted emerging adults rated relational maturity as more important than did Externalizing or Internalizing emerging adults.

• Well-adjusted emerging adults also rated norm compliance as more important than did Externalizing or Internalizing emerging adults.

• Well-adjusted emerging adults rated family capacities as more important than did Externalizing and Internalizing emerging adults.
Results

Differences in outcome variables as a function of cluster membership

- Well-adjusted and Average emerging adults had higher levels of identity achievement regarding occupation than did Externalizing or Internalizing emerging adults, who did not differ from one another.

- Well-adjusted emerging adults had higher levels of identity achievement regarding religiosity than did Externalizing or Internalizing emerging adults, who did not differ from one another.

- Well-adjusted emerging adults had higher levels of identity achievement regarding values and family than did Average, Externalizing or Internalizing emerging adults (who did not differ from one another).

- Well-adjusted emerging adults had the highest level of identity achievement regarding dating, followed by Average emerging adults; and Externalizing and Internalizing emerging adults had the lowest levels (and did not differ from one another).
Externalizers:

→ High levels of drinking, drug use, sexual partners, pornography use, and video game use

→ Do not see relational maturity, norm compliance, and family capacities as important criteria for adulthood

→ Lower identity in occupation, religiosity, values, family, and dating
Summary

Internalizers:

→ High levels of depression and anxiety, and low levels of self-worth and social acceptance

→ Do not see relational maturity, norm compliance, and family capacities as important criteria for adulthood

→ Lower identity in occupation, religiosity, values, family, and dating
Average:

→ High levels of religiosity, low levels of risk behaviors, video game use, and pornography use, and average depression, anxiety, and self-worth

→ High levels of identity achievement regarding occupation, lower achievement in values and family compared to the well-adjusted group
Summary

Well-Adjusted:

→ High levels of closeness to mother and father, high internal regulation of values, low levels of depression and anxiety, and high levels of self-worth and social acceptance

→ Rate relational maturity, norm compliance, and family capacities as important criteria for adulthood

→ High identity achievement in occupation, religiosity, values, family, and dating
Current research/conceptual model
First-year student cluster model

**Questions:**
- *Can we use data to identify students who are likely to flourish or flounder during the first year?*
- *Can we differentiate groups of students with different motivations, strengths and needs in order to connect them specifically with resources they need?*

**Based on responses from three first-year student surveys:**
- Pre-arrival Survey (July)
- Freshman Mentoring Survey (January)
- End-of-year Survey (March)

**Cluster analysis based on questions about**
- high school behavior and experience
- motivations related to higher education
- expectations for first year
What do our clusters look like?

Four clusters defined across five scales

Scales
(representing student motivations and past experiences)
Clusters

1. Academically focused (AF)
   - Highest on academic dimension
   - Average on other dimensions

2. Academically undeveloped (AU)
   - Lower on academic dimension
   - Average on other dimensions

3. Disengaged/reticent (Dis)
   - Low on every dimension

4. Balanced/well adjusted (Bal)
   - High on all dimensions
## Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>AF</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>Dis</th>
<th>Bal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>1445</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of total</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT Composite</td>
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<td>28.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
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<td>High School GPA</td>
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<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.77</td>
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<td>BYU GPA</td>
<td>3.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
How does high school experience differ across clusters?

**High School experience**

- Studied more than two hours/day
- HS courses "very/extremely" challenging
- HS success due more to **ability** than **effort**
- Flourished in high school

Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AF</th>
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<th>Bal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How does fall semester experience differ across clusters?

**Fall semester** (self-description)

- Diligent/hard working
- Unorganized
- Effort
- Satisfied w/ academic performance
- Flourished

Clusters

AF | AU | Dis | Bal
---|----|-----|-----

Very low | Low | Moderate | High | Very high
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal importance</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialize</td>
<td>AF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new ideas and perspectives</td>
<td>AU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance your personal spirituality</td>
<td>Dis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be challenged intellectually</td>
<td>Bal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal importance</th>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialize</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn new ideas and perspectives</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Be challenged intellectually</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goal importance scale:
- Very low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very high
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

**Goal accomplishment**

- Socialize
- Learn new ideas and perspectives
- Enhance your personal spirituality
- Grow from intellectual challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>AF</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Socialize</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grow from intellectual challenge</td>
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<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

### Academic participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>AF</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>Dis</th>
<th>Bal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete readings &amp; assignments before class</td>
<td>Very h</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss course-related ideas outside class</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get feedback before submitting work</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work harder than you thought you could</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write multiple drafts of a paper</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Clusters**:

- **AF**: Academic performance
- **AU**: Academic understanding
- **Dis**: Disengagement
- **Bal**: Balanced engagement
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

Social engagement
- informal social activities
- study or discussion groups
- volunteer service

Clusters

<table>
<thead>
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</table>
### How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent in …</th>
<th>Clusters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic work outside class</td>
<td>AF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal spiritual development</td>
<td>AU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for pay (on/off campus)</td>
<td>Dis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing in person</td>
<td>Bal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the internet (not school work)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very low</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

**Identity**
As a whole, I am satisfied with my life.
I like the kind of person I am.
I am often disappointed with myself.
I feel like I know & understand myself well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

**Belonging**
- I belong at BYU.
- I have fit in at BYU socially.
- I have fit in at BYU academically.
- I have fit in at BYU spiritually.

Clusters:
- AF
- AU
- Dis
- Bal

Belonging:
- Very low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very high
How do clusters differ at the end of the first year?

**Clusters**

Satisfaction/Flourishing
- Made the right choice to attend BYU
- Flourishing
- Would choose BYU again

**AF**

**AU**

**Dis**

**Bal**

**Very low**

**Low**

**Moderate**

**High**

**Very high**
Regression: Predicting “flourishing” at the end of the first year

• Flourished in high school
• Expected to work fewer hours for pay first year
• More settled in beliefs and values
• More satisfied with life
• More confident in ability to make friends
evaluate your own assumptions, conclusions and reasoning
evaluate the credibility of information sources (internet, magazines, books, other people, etc.)
explore a variety of ways to solve a problem rather than focusing only one way
articulate reasons to support a point you are trying to make
express your thoughts and feelings clearly and effectively in writing

Intellectual Constructs

“Academically Focused” Cluster
evaluate your own assumptions, conclusions and reasoning
evaluate the credibility of information sources (internet, magazines, books, other people, etc.)
explore a variety of ways to solve a problem rather than focusing only one way
articulate reasons to support a point you are trying to make
express your thoughts and feelings clearly and effectively in writing
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Intellectual Constructs

“Balanced” Cluster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intel</th>
<th>Dis</th>
<th>AU</th>
<th>AF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
I have at least one personal friend in whom I can confide.
I gain personal, emotional, or spiritual strength from my relationships with other people.
I make friends easily.
I recognize opportunities to learn and interact with people different from me and I take advantage of those opportunities.

Social Constructs

“Academically Focused” Cluster
Social Constructs

“Academically Undeveloped” Cluster

- I have at least one personal friend in whom I can confide.
- I gain personal, emotional, or spiritual strength from my relationships with other people.
- I make friends easily.
- I recognize opportunities to learn and interact with people different from me and I take advantage of those opportunities.
Social Constructs

“Disengaged” Cluster

I have at least one personal friend in whom I can confide.

I gain personal, emotional, or spiritual strength from my relationships with other people.

I make friends easily.

I recognize opportunities to learn and interact with people different from me and I take advantage of those opportunities.
I have at least one personal friend in whom I can confide.

I gain personal, emotional, or spiritual strength from my relationships with other people.

I make friends easily.

I recognize opportunities to learn and interact with people different from me and I take advantage of those opportunities.

Social Constructs

“Balanced” Cluster

Bal Pre
Bal Post
My relationship with God provides me with a sense of peace and optimism about my life. I successfully translate scriptural principles into personal behavior. I do what I know I should do, even when no one else will know. When someone offends me, I forgive him or her readily.
My relationship with God provides me with a sense of peace and optimism about my life.

I successfully translate scriptural principles into personal behavior.

I do what I know I should do, even when no one else will know.

When someone offends me, I forgive him or her readily.
My relationship with God provides me with a sense of peace and optimism about my life.

I successfully translate scriptural principles into personal behavior.

I do what I know I should do, even when no one else will know.

When someone offends me, I forgive him or her readily.
My relationship with God provides me with a sense of peace and optimism about my life.

I successfully translate scriptural principles into personal behavior.

I do what I know I should do, even when no one else will know.

When someone offends me, I forgive him or her readily.
Independent Living Constructs

“Academically Focused” Cluster

Accepting responsibility for consequences of your choices and actions
Finding/asking for help when you need it
Having a good balance between academics, social, church and other facets of life
Managing your time
Meeting deadlines without reminders from others
Resolving conflicts with others

AF Pre
AF Post
Independent Living Constructs

“Academically Undeveloped” Cluster

Accepting responsibility for consequences of your choices and actions
Finding/asking for help when you need it
Having a good balance between academics, social, church and other facets of life
Managing your time
Meeting deadlines without reminders from others
Resolving conflicts with others
Independent Living Constructs

“Disengaged” Cluster

Accepting responsibility for consequences of your choices and actions
Finding/asking for help when you need it
Having a good balance between academics, social, church and other facets of life
Managing your time
Meeting deadlines without reminders from others
Resolving conflicts with others

Dis Pre
Dis Post
Independent Living Constructs

“Balanced” Cluster

- Accepting responsibility for consequences of your choices and actions
- Finding/asking for help when you need it
- Having a good balance between academics, social, church and other facets of life
- Managing your time
- Meeting deadlines without reminders from others
- Resolving conflicts with others

Graph showing changes in Independent Living Constructs before and after a certain period.
Cluster summary

1. Academically focused (AF)
   - Driven academically; less engaged/comfortable socially
   - Perfectionistic, anxious, self-critical—in danger of burn out?

2. Academically undeveloped (AU)
   - Less motivated academically, lower performing
   - Muddling through first year

3. Disengaged/reticent (Dis)
   - Intelligent but unmotivated, don’t want to be here
   - Report least accomplishment & growth, least happy with themselves

4. Balanced/well adjusted (Bal)
   - Lowest performing academically, but engaged in all facets of FYE
   - Happy with experience, accepting
Discussion

• Who are the students who flourish and flounder on your campus?

• How can/do you identify them?

• What are the implications for working with students who flourish and flounder?
## Implications for Intentional Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academically Focused</th>
<th>Academically Undeveloped</th>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
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<td>Orientation</td>
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<td>Seminars</td>
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<td>Learning Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
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Contact information

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