Two years ago an article in the *New York Times* titled *The Case for Delayed Adulthood* by Laurence Steinberg was assigned to me as outside reading for one of my college classes. At the time, I decided to sweep this assignment under the rug and carry on with my life, only to find out that this article would forever change my outlook on life, an outlook that had been established within me over the course of almost seven years, once I decided to go back and read it over a year later.

Growing up, my mom always taught from experience but in retrospect it seems that she never adjusted her expectations despite the fact that my experiences were much different. At twenty-one years old, my mom was already married and already owned her first home whereas I am still attending school and still heavily relying on both of my parents for financial support. My delayed entry into adulthood and these stark differences in progression have caused me to feel a great deal of guilt and anxiety throughout the majority of my college career. Upon reading this article came the realization that I was not alone and that delayed entry into adulthood was not a personal flaw but rather a generational difference. Steinberg’s findings that “prolonged adolescence…fosters novelty-seeking and the acquisition of new skills” (Steinberg, 2014) was groundbreaking news to me and peaked my curiosity in further researching this topic. While investigating this new topic, I stumbled upon the work of psychologist Jeffrey Arnett and was astounded at his ability to accurately depict my feelings, ones that I’ve never been able to put into words. Arnett’s complete understanding of a generation other than his own was not only inspiring but was enough to change my worldview entirely.

Today, psychologists use the concept of the life cycle to organize and understand human development. Our basic life cycle can be observed as occurring in stages: infancy, childhood,
adolescence, and adulthood. Although both infancy and childhood are essential stages of 
development, “the act of introspection” (Sommer, 1978) and “abstract expression of ideas about 
intangible objects and events” (Sommer, 1978) are unlikely to occur within individuals in these 
stages of development. As such, adolescence is the first stage in the human life cycle where 
individuals begin to demonstrate metacognitive reflection, or thinking about thought. These 
newly developed capacities trigger an “increasing awareness of both self and the world beyond 
self” (Sommer, 1978).

“Adolescence is a period of important developmental transitions. Changes occur in 
cognitive, emotional, and social functioning and, most strikingly, with the onset of puberty, in 
physical stature and body contour” (Nottelmann, Inoff-Germain, Susman, & Chrousos, 1990). 
Adolescence is said to occur in individuals aged between 11 and 21 years old, (Steinberg, 1993) 
an age range that encompasses all high school students. During this time period, individuals 
experience psychosocial changes and challenges such as “discovering and understanding who 
they are as individuals (identity) and expressing sexual feelings and enjoying physical contact 
with others (sexuality)” (Steinberg, 1993). For me, high school was just the beginning of a long 
and painful journey that I couldn’t be more thankful for.

At the time, attending high school was not an aspect of my daily life that I was grateful 
for, rather it was an aspect of my daily life that I very much detested. I never understood how 
college students and adults were able to look back on their high school years with nostalgia, 
remembering those times as times of self-discovery and learning, both about one’s curriculum as 
well as oneself. Back then, high school didn’t seem to provide much of a benefit other than 
aiding in acceptance to college, which was only even possible if you were able to keep your
grades and your mental health afloat with the burdens of social and familial pressure weighing you down. When it came to authority, my parents were on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of almost everything, which created an almost perfectly balanced middle ground between work and leisure as my mom was strict while my dad was lenient.

My parents divorced when I was eight-years-old, and up until I was fifteen I lived solely with my mom. Responsibility, punctuality, organization, and commitment were practices that she preached. She is stubborn, and she doesn’t take shortcuts or excuses. Not only does she get the job done, but she does it to perfection. These are aspects of my personality that I learned from her. I think that if I were to have lived with her for a shorter amount of time than I did, that I would not demonstrate as many admirable qualities, standards, or morals that I feel I employ today.

At fifteen I decided to move in with my dad, and I can’t say that I have the slightest bit of regret regarding this decision. My dad is much more laid back than my mom. He is nonjudgmental and supportive. He believed at fifteen that I was old enough to make my own decisions, all of them – so I did. The one unifying expectation that my parents held was that of my grades. Ironically, my polar opposite parents shared the same attitude about the importance of earning good grades. My mom insisted that attendance all day, everyday was the recipe for success despite how tired or depressed I was. Meanwhile my dad believed that as long as my grades were good, that I was smart enough to make my own decisions about attendance– and my grades were good. So while I resided with him I only went to school when I felt like I needed to, which I can’t say was often.
Unlike most of my friends, I wasn’t cutting class or missing school to sit around at somebody's house and get high while their parents were at work. I was skipping school because I was either sick or sleeping. Everybody told me that being tired was a normal aspect of adolescence, that teenagers needed more sleep than most – but what I didn’t understand was why my friends didn’t need as much sleep as I did, and why they never woke up feeling sick the way I did. On average, I was sleeping twelve hours a day which was only providing me with enough energy to make it through half of a school day. Twelve hours of sleep for six hours of energy made me feel like I was a walking zombie. Despite the fact that I was sleeping more than enough hours per night, I was still experiencing the physical and mental symptoms associated with lack of sleep; the worst of them being depression and a weakened immune system. I was always tired and I was always sick, so when my dad let the responsibility of attendance fall into my hands, I strategized. I used the organizational skills I learned from my mom to keep track of exactly when assignments were due or exams were being given, and I was disciplined enough to make sure I attended school on those days. I knew that good grades equaled the freedom to make my own decisions, so I kept my grades high while minimizing the time I spent at school so that I could maximize my time to sleep, which I felt would improve my physical and mental health.

High schools normally have systems and regulations in place for the number of absences allowed per student. However, my high school had bigger problems to tend to than how many absences an honor roll student had. Many of these problems involved my friends who, as I mentioned earlier, opted for drugs over class. My friends used to call me the ‘black-sheep’ because none of us ever really understood what it was that made us friends. We had different morals, and aspirations. We were heading in totally different directions. I think what brought us
together was the fact that we were all just trying to get by, and I think that by having each other, it helped. Although my friends weren’t as successful in their academic careers as I was, they were much more interesting than those who were. I learned from them. I learned things that they don’t teach you in school and I am grateful for that.

However, as I outgrew my naïveté, I eventually came to the realization that just because they were good friends didn’t mean they were good people. It took me a long time to realize this. There’s a saying, “You are who you surround yourself with,” and I learned that nothing will make you feel more depressed and more alone in this world than spending time surrounded by people who are not relatable. I was beginning to question if my friendships were formed on the basis of commonalities or if I was only really friends with some of these people due to the fact that I saw them nearly everyday for eight hours a day at school, at least I did before I lived with my dad.

Several years after high school I was diagnosed with narcolepsy, a neurological sleep disorder that causes overwhelming and extreme drowsiness. This was a diagnosis I desperately needed in high school but one that was only identified and treated with medication during my junior year of college. When I reflect, I often harbor feelings of resentment towards my parents as well as myself for not realizing that my behavior was due to illness. I try to forgive this oversight and make peace with my past. I remind myself, as Frederick Douglass once said, that “without struggle, there can be no progress.” Despite the hardships I endured and how badly I struggled with my physical and mental health throughout high school, part of me is thankful for that part of my life. There was a period of time that I truly thought my life would end before I finished high school but looking back on those experiences, I feel that they have only made me
stronger. “Things will be different once you finish high school, you just need to hold on” my dad used to tell me. I’m still not so sure if he said it to make me feel better or if he actually meant it, but either way I will never feel the same way as I did when I was in high school. That is something I am thankful for.

Throughout those years, I learned discipline and accountability from my mom. I learned about the responsibility of independence and the issues accompanying too much freedom from my dad. I truly believe that the length and the timing of my residency with each of my parents was a fundamental component to my development as a person. As time passed, I managed to graduate high school and pursue the next stage of my life: college. Adolescence, whose Latin origin means “to grow into adulthood” (Steinberg, 1993) is a stage in the human life cycle that is mostly comprised of high school students, as stated previously. Unlike high school students, college students sadly do not have a defining or relatable stage of development by which to categorize themselves.

Before the 19th century in the United States, there were two life stages that were universally accepted, those being childhood and adulthood. Following birth, a child was almost immediately put to work with some of the youngest child laborers younger than seven years old (Fried, 2014). Over the years, child labor laws in the U.S. were refined but it wasn’t until around 1904 that psychologist Granville Stanley Hall introduced a new stage of development in his book *Adolescence*. Hall believed that societal changes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were responsible for noticeable changes in human development. Children were no longer sent straight to work but were now required to obtain a secondary education. This obligation allowed for children to become literate and more competent. This change also meant that children needed a
prolonged dependence on parental figures, a dependency that allowed children to fully grow and develop in a healthy fashion. While his work contains theories that have later been disproved, Hall’s general idea of “adolescence as a new stage of life” led to the acceptance of adolescence as a concrete stage of human development categorized by distinct and explicit characteristics (Henig, 2010).

Since Hall’s time, psychologists have studied adolescence as a recognized stage of human development. But it wasn’t until the 1990’s that psychologist Jeffrey Arnett realized that the past was repeating itself, and that societal changes were influencing human development yet again. As a professor in his mid-thirties at the University of Missouri, Jeffrey Arnett recognized vast differences between himself and his students. His speculations sparked his research as he began to study the college age group. Eventually, Arnett wrote his first article outlining his “theory of emerging adulthood” which was published in the *American Psychologist* in May 2000.

Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood introduces a modernized stage of human development that has been made possible due to the industrialization, technological advancements, and societal transformations that our country has made over the last few decades. According to Arnett’s research, he believes that the stages of human development are no longer so clearly defined as black and white, with adolescents transitioning directly into adulthood. He believes a grey area exists between these stages, an area he defines as emerging adulthood.

Emerging adulthood can be thought of as a stage of ambivalence. Individuals in this stage of life commonly share the opinion of “feeling in between.” They continue to struggle with adolescent matters while experiencing new responsibilities and expectations that pertain to
adulthood. Arnett outlines five features of an emerging adult that set this life stage apart from the rest. Those features are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between, and possibilities (Munsey, 2006). Arnett believes that the main reason for the emergence of this new life stage is due to the fact that the expectations accepted by society as a whole for those in the 18-25 demographic have changed. This shift is largely due to the fact that many adolescents now attend college and are able to depend on their parents over the years while doing so. There is no longer a rush to get married, have children, or earn a living the way our parents had.

It seems that older generations still hold the expectation that an adolescent transitioning into adulthood must get a job, get married, and have children immediately. Our parents and grandparents might not realize the generational differences that have formed as a result of our continuously developing country. From personal experience, I believe that parents put a great deal of pressure on their children to follow the expectations that had been imposed upon them in the past without realizing that times have changed. Children become distressed as they try to adhere to societal expectations without disappointing their parents, who often hold an opposing, perhaps outdated viewpoint.

Arnett is one individual who realizes that the expectations of the past are not applicable to current generations. As our society rapidly advances, the human life cycle must be reassessed and redeveloped in order to stay relevant. With the introduction of emerging adulthood as a new stage of development, Arnett attempts to demarcate those who no longer feel that they can clearly identify as an adolescent nor as an adult. The stage of emerging adulthood is a concept that gives misunderstood college students like myself the opportunity to finally feel like we belong.
In order to better understand this newly proposed stage of human development, one could compare the life cycle of a human being to that of a caterpillar-to-butterfly by aligning the stages of each life cycle. If you were to ask a child to explain where butterflies come from, they would probably rave about their school science project, or reference Eric Carle’s famous children’s book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. This is because most of us learn in elementary school that a butterfly comes from a caterpillar through the process of metamorphosis; a process generally attributed to insects and amphibians. At the 2006 annual meeting of the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology, a panel of twelve biologists presented a symposium where each panelist was given the opportunity to define ‘metamorphosis’ in their own terms. Among the array of definitions, it became apparent that the term ‘metamorphosis’ applied to a number of different series of developmental stages. If you define metamorphosis as “a particular life history transition in multicellular organisms, from a larval to a juvenile (or adult) stage, accompanied by dramatic morphological, physiological, and ecological changes” as panelist Thomas Flatt did, then the concept of metamorphosis applies to insects, amphibians, echinoderms, and some fish. But if it is defined in the words of Cory Bishop as “organismal ontogeny,” then one could show how metamorphosis describes the development of many animals, including humans.

Complete metamorphosis of a caterpillar entails progression through four life stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Likewise, the life cycle of a human traditionally involves succession through four stages as well. These stages are known as infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. For both organisms, the evolution from one stage to the next results in drastic changes both physically and behaviorally. In order to better understand how metamorphosis can define human growth, we must compare each stage side by side.
When comparing the life cycle of a human to that of a caterpillar, the egg stage of a
caterpillar’s life aligns with the infancy stage of human development. Each organism is at the
beginning stage of life. Next, the larva stage of butterfly metamorphosis seems to most
accurately exemplify human adolescence as both stages are categorized by growth. During the
larval stage, the organism is more commonly understood and perceived as a caterpillar and at this
time, the caterpillar still has a considerable amount of development to undergo before it is
deemed an adult. These developmental changes are driven by hormonal changes, such as the
release of ecdysone and the presence of juvenile hormone (JH). Ecdysone is a steroid hormone
that increases appetite and instructs the caterpillar to molt while high levels of JH play a role in
preventing development into the subsequent stages until the caterpillar reaches full size, usually
after four rounds of molting. (Jones, 2012). Hormones are the driving force behind complete
metamorphosis, especially during the larval stage, as they guide the larva through the necessary
steps of development (Puiu, 2015). Similarly, adolescence is a stage of human development that
is characterized by the onset of puberty, a collective term that refers to all of the physical
changes an individual experience as they pass from childhood to adulthood. These changes occur
as a result of the organization or activation of certain hormones such as androgens and estrogens,
which promote physical and behavioral transformations (Steinberg, 1993). Lastly, the adult
stages of each life cycle coincide with each other. At this point, major development ceases and
the adult organisms from each life cycle are ready to experience the world in their most mature
forms – but we must not forget about the pupa stage of a butterfly; the one following the larval
stage and preceding adulthood.
During the pupa stage, a decrease in the presence of juvenile hormone combined with the release of ecdysone instruct the caterpillar to molt again for a fifth and final round (Puiu, 2015). During this final molt, the caterpillar spins a silk pad on the underside of a branch and uses “a hook-covered appendage called a cremaster to attach itself to this pad. It twists around, embedding its cremaster firmly in the silk. Then, it sheds its skin, revealing the chrysalis. The chrysalis hangs upside down from the cremaster until the butterfly is ready to emerge” (Wilson, 2008). At this stage, the pupa is no longer appears like a caterpillar but has not yet emerged as a butterfly. It is “in between,” analogous to an emerging adult.

Arnett’s emerging adult stage of development compares to the pupa stage of a butterfly, with both stages categorized as being intermediate. As children we are taught that the process of pupation occurs inside the chrysalis where the caterpillar simply sprouts the necessary body parts, then emerges as this beautifully transformed organism. The truth behind this process is much messier.

Once the caterpillar hangs upside down to begin pupation, it sheds its larval skin and exposes the chrysalis. At this point, the chrysalis is extremely vulnerable and fragile as it takes some time to harden into a protective casing (Wilson, 2008). Once hardened, all of the cells that once comprised the larva, with the exception of imaginal cells, begin to self destruct inside this casing as instructed to by certain hormones (Puiu, 2015). After this digestion process, what remains inside the chrysalis is a protein rich nutrient fluid of digested cells and imaginal cells. Imaginal cells are essential in adult development as they are primed and pre-determined for the creation of the adult extremities. Imaginal cells “use the protein-rich soup all around them to fuel the rapid cell division required to form the wings, antennae, legs, eyes, genitals and all the other
features of an adult butterfly” (Puiu, 2015). Once the imaginal cells have fully differentiated, certain hormones stimulate the emergence of the adult butterfly (Jones, 2012). Although this process is gruesome and complex, it is one that emerging adults can identify with; we may not undergo the same self-destructing and rebirthing process, but this is the stage in our lives where we too experience the most complex changes in our identity. If metamorphosis can so simply be defined as a process of transformation, then this definition suggests the possibility of human metamorphosis – and if so, then my growth and development represents my metamorphosis.

Although my life cycle began over twenty years ago, I’ve only recently begun to reflect on the progress of my development. As I conceptualize this growth in the stages of metamorphosis, it is clear that I fall into the pupa stage of development since I categorize myself as an emerging adult. As mentioned previously, Arnett has identified five definitive features that allow emerging adulthood to be distinguished as a unique and individual stage of development. These features are instability, feeling in between, self-focus, identity exploration, and possibilities.

**Instability (Change of Major):**

Instability is one of the five features of an emerging adult and is defined by the various directional changes an individual experiences during this stage in his or her life. During emerging adulthood, most individuals have formulated a plan or direction in which they believe their life should be headed, for example: choosing their major(s), partner(s), job(s), or residence (Feeley, Halliburton, & Mastrorilli, 2010). Instability deals with learning from your mistakes and exploring alternative options and approaches. As a college student, I’ve experienced this phenomenon of instability a number of times, but my change of major in 2015 has been that the
most substantial and influential redirection of my life plan thus far. Despite the fact that I knew what academic discipline was most appealing to my interests, I was still extremely hesitant in declaring a major and had not done so until the beginning of my junior year in college. For years I was torn between declaring psychology or biology, so my solution to this indecision was to look at the bigger picture: my career. My ultimate career goal is to become a Physician’s Assistant (PA). What seemed to make the most sense at the time was to choose to major in biology, so that is what I did. Once declared, I rarely revisited this decision until I encountered a roadblock on the path that my life was supposed to be heading down during my junior year.

Unaware of the nightmare I was about to experience, I enrolled in CHEM 2131: Organic Chemistry to fulfill the requirement for the biology major. This course was the most grueling course I have ever taken; I still cringe at the thought of having to attempt it again. After sinking into a bit of a depression following the results of my first exam, I knew I did not ever want to feel this way again. I scheduled a meeting with my advisor to analyze my options. During this meeting, my advisor bluntly suggested I “reevaluate my abilities” and that perhaps biology was not the best field of study for me. At first I was feeling sensitive and vulnerable, but those feelings were quickly redirected to anger, as I felt that my intelligence was being presumed as inadequate. Admittedly, it wasn’t until the following summer that I came to understand my advisor’s concerns, despite the seemingly insensitive approach she went about addressing them. Ultimately, I decided an adjustment was necessary for my sanity and continued success, so I changed my major from biology to psychology and declared biology as my minor. Despite the complications that I’ve encountered and the revisions that I have made to my life plan, I now see that these complications were beneficial rather than harmful. They have allowed me to learn
from my mistakes and find roads to success. My instability is a defining factor in my emerging adulthood; it has allowed me to become the person I am today.

**Feeling in Between (Mom’s Recipes):**

Feeling in-between is another defining characteristic of an emerging adult. This feature helps define emerging adulthood as its own stage of life because it describes those who feel they have not quite reached adulthood yet they no longer consider themselves adolescents. They are literally in between two stages. During emerging adulthood, maturity and responsibility levels are on a steady incline despite the fact that emerging adults have not yet experienced the milestones of matrimony, childbearing, financial independence, homeownership, or the beginning of a career. According to Arnett, there are three conditions that indicate the start of adulthood: “accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and financial independence” (Feeley, Halliburton, & Mastrorilli, 2010). When comparing these characteristics and conditions to myself, I’ve come to the realization that although certain aspects of my life make me feel as if I’ve reached adulthood such as living alone and taking care of myself, it is now apparent that I would have never been able to exercise this independence without the support of my parents. Although I work, cook, clean, and attend school independently, I am provided these opportunities through a car, an apartment, and a tuition that is paid for by my parents. The extent of my financial dependence on my parents is one of the biggest factors that delays my entrance into adulthood. The financial support that I receive from my parents is what allows me to continue to grow and learn so that I will be able to support myself in the future, but it is also what holds me back from complete independence. As of right now, my dependence on
my parents for financial support in nearly every aspect of my life is one of the biggest conditions that keeps me stuck in my chrysalis somewhere between adolescence and adulthood.

Aside from financial support, there are other areas in my life where I often reach out to my parents for guidance, especially when cooking. When I was little, I always thought that my mom was a five-star chef, and still to this day I can honestly say that my mom is the best cook I’ve ever met. When I was little my mom taught me how to cook and by age ten I was able to make fried chicken cutlets by myself. My mom always emphasized how important it was that my brother and I knew how to feed ourselves. She was always health conscious. It was important that her children understand nutrition and good habits, such as shopping the perimeter of the supermarket and avoiding fast food. Although it has been eleven years since my mom first began teaching me how to cook, not a day goes by where I don’t learn something new from her. Despite my capabilities and my desire for independence, I still rely on my mom’s guidance and expertise to walk me through cooking new recipes and using new techniques. As I live in my own apartment six states and 695 miles away from her, I still find myself texting and calling her for help, especially when I’m cooking. I am physically independent but not completely, and that is why I remain in between as an emerging adult.

Self Focus (Watercolor Drawings):

Due to the immense changes that take place during emerging adulthood, self-focus is a critical feature of this stage of development as it allows individuals to concentrate on their personal needs. This feature of emerging adulthood is possible because of an increase in freedom combined with a delay in “significant adult responsibilities, such as marriage and parenthood”
Emerging adults are able to focus on themselves during this time period because they have less demanding responsibilities than adults and are under less authority than adolescents.

As I’ve only recently begun to reflect on my development as an individual, I would say that a large portion of this growth has taken place over the last two years as a student at UNCC. Along with all of the changes I’ve experienced thus far, there has been an equal, if not greater, amount of stress and anxiety as well. As a student, I have never really had to put much effort into my schoolwork. Good grades have always come easily for me. But after I failed miserably during my attempt at CHEM 2131 (organic chemistry), I realized that my natural ability for succeeding in school was not foolproof plan for success. The difficulty and rigor of this course was unlike any other I had ever experienced. I was frustrated and upset as I had never had an issue with schoolwork before. My usual effort and study techniques were challenged and ultimately fell short. As dramatic as it sounds, this course threw me into a bout of a depression that I was only able to finally come back from upon withdrawing from the course. I felt as if I were drowning in the middle of the ocean without any signs of help or rescue.

Another factor that perpetuated my bout of depression was the fact that I had just moved to Charlotte by myself and had no friends or family nearby, I had to rely on myself to pull myself out of this slump. Ultimately, I decided that a new approach was required. My usual strategies were not getting me very far. After considering new options in promoting my happiness, I decided to head to Michaels® to purchase art supplies, as I felt this was a unique approach to solving my problem. After setting up my supplies at my desk, I began to draw and paint in watercolor.
I found this practice to be calming and restorative. It was contemplative and promoted awareness such as greater self-awareness and self-focus, as well as a deeper understanding of myself both mentally and emotionally. This mindful-based practice unlocked full exploration of my soul and spirit and allowed me to display these findings in a way that was both personal and unique. This practice encouraged full and free self-expression, a style of communication that I was unfamiliar and exciting to me.

As I progress through my academic career, I find that I am becoming more and more of a “left brain” type of person. I am more logical, organized, and realistic than a right brained type of person who exhibits a greater amount of creativity and a more extravagant imagination. As of recently, good grades were the only thing I had ever made that I was proud of but creating these drawings led to the realization that I could succeed outside of my comfort zone, and I found that to be very fulfilling. By finding a practice that allowed me to pull myself out of a slump and channel my focus on myself and my feelings, I feel that I have gained a better understanding of myself, my desires, my goals, and my direction.

Identity Exploration (Sorority Pin):

Another of Arnett’s five features of an emerging adult is identity exploration. This feature describes those individuals who are trying out different options, especially in the areas of love and work. “By becoming involved with different people, emerging adults learn about the qualities that are most important to them in another person, both the qualities that attract them and the qualities they find distasteful and annoying” (Arnett, 2004).
As a college student far from home, I was more concerned with making friends than finding love, so I explored my options and decided to join a sorority. The selection process was demanding and exhausting. It seemed like a ton of work just to make friends, however the Greek life coordinators told us over and over again to TTP (“trust the process”). So I stayed and continued to try and impress complete strangers. Ultimately, after being dropped from my top three choices, I ended up joining the founding class of Alpha Chi Omega (AXΩ), a new sorority that we would establish here at UNCC. Although at first it seemed like I had made a ton of new friends, I began to question the legitimacy of these friendships after a few conversations and again when the $800 per semester fee was assessed. The organization felt like a scam and the friendships felt forced and fake. I didn’t understand how a girl who didn’t know my name one day was calling me her sister the next. We were not united by a common set of standards, morals, hobbies, or interests. We were simply united by one mutual decision—our decision to join AXΩ.

As I stated previously, they say that “you are who you surround yourself with,” and although I knew that dropping out might damage my social life, I could not waste another dime, minute, or ounce of effort trying to fit in or identify as a member of this organization. There were no shared features between what I wanted for myself and what this organization had to offer. Following my termination of membership, I realized that it was the best possible decision I could have made. Most importantly, I do not regret exploring this option. I’ve learned one of my most valuable lessons here at UNCC, which is that it is more important to be true to yourself than it is to fit in and that the opinions of others should never influence you to do something that you don’t feel is right for you.
**Possibilities (Scrubs):**

Lastly, emerging adulthood is recognized as the age of possibilities. During this stage of development, “emerging adults often hold a very optimistic view of the future and truly believe that they will accomplish their dreams and overcome past circumstances, such as an unhappy home life, in an effort to become the person they’d like to be” (Feeley, Halliburton, & Mastrorilli, 2010).

As an emerging adult, I can honestly say that I do hold an optimistic view of the future and I do believe I will accomplish my goals. Millennial’s, or U.S. citizens born between 1982-2004 (Bump, 2014), have been afforded luxuries that were simply unavailable to past generations, luxuries that have allowed for emerging adults to experience new opportunities and possibilities. Luxuries that allow for an optimistic view of the future. For example, if you were to compare the number of college students who studied abroad in the 1990’s to the number of college students that have studied abroad in the past ten years, you would probably find that more college students have studied abroad in the past ten years. This is due to the fact that past generations simply were not afforded the same luxuries that current generations are; so despite the fact that I do hold a very optimistic view for my future, I don’t think that this view is unrealistic by any means.

Emerging adults rarely commit to one way or another when deciding upon the direction their life is headed. Instead they tend to explore their options. Emerging adulthood is the last stage of development before most life decisions are deciding upon/become solidified. As a result, emerging adults often see this stage in their lives as an opportunity to transform themselves into
the person they wish to be rather than the person that society or their parents have persuaded them to be.

Entering the medical field has always been my direction. In my opinion, pursuing a career in the medical field is similar to running a marathon. Both take time and persistence. As I continue to work towards this goal everyday, I keep in mind that slow and steady wins the race. During the fall semester of 2014, I experienced working in a clinical setting for the first time as a volunteer at the Charlotte Community Health Clinic. Although the range of responsibilities for volunteers in a clinical setting is quite limited, this opportunity was inspiring and educational. As volunteers, we were required to wear scrubs. We were assigned tasks such as checking patients in/out, scheduling new appointments, pulling and prepping charts, and faxing prescriptions. Volunteering at the Charlotte Community Health Clinic and having the opportunity to work in a clinical setting is essentially the first experience I had in my career choice. Volunteering is responsible for affirming my passion in this vocation. I believe that as long as I work hard and stay committed, the possibilities are endless.

As I reflect on my college experience, I am overwhelmed with pride and awe. My personal and academic development, as well as my capabilities, have truly surpassed any and all expectations that I’ve ever had for myself. These past four years of my life are a major milestone in my growth as a person and I am grateful for having the opportunity to attend college. A few important lessons that I’ve learned over the past few years that I will continue to exercise throughout my life are to always be confident in yourself and to understand that every individual will experience their life in a different way, which means there is never only one way to solve a problem or one route to the finish line; and that it is more than okay to take a different route than
everybody else. For the longest time I struggled with understanding the latter lesson. I always felt as if I were failing when my reality did not align with the standard college experience imposed upon young students by society. Deciding to revisit the article *The Case for Delayed Adulthood* by Laurence Steinberg (despite the fact that this assignment was now way past the date) turned a seemingly meaningless assignment into a life changing epiphany.

When you turn to friends and family for guidance, they can give advice, suggestions, or words of comfort to a certain extent. It is up to make that guidance truly resonate within you. As I was going through this personal struggle it seemed that no amount of kind words or guidance could alleviate my anxieties or feelings of failure. This personal struggle was something that I needed to work through my own but the problem was that I didn’t know how. This article set in motion a chain of events that led to one of the biggest breakthroughs I’ve had as an emerging adult.

After reading this article I came to the realization that each individual walks on her own unique path and that there is not only one path to success. Additionally, I came to better understand my parents and why they hold the expectations that they do. I feel that I have learned a great deal from researching generational differences and that this knowledge has led me to further inquiry about the disparities between generations.

Upon my inquiries I discovered the work of Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett, specifically his theory of emerging adulthood, which sheds a positive light on the millennial generation. This theory defines where I am developmentally – in a period of ambivalence. This stage attempts to define individuals transitioning from adolescence to adulthood; and it applies to college students like me. Everyday I continue to impress myself and I am astonished at how far I’ve already
come. The experiences, opportunities, and challenges that I have faced in my years as a college student have been both remarkable and memorable. These years have shaped me into a scholar citizen and a well-rounded person, a person that I can honestly and confidently say I am proud to be. Arnett’s work has provided me with relief and comfort. I no longer feel guilty for not having grown up or met the criteria for adulthood but instead I feel as if I am exactly where I’m supposed to be. I was the caterpillar that hung upside down and formed a chrysalis, and now I am breaking free. I am an emerging adult and this is my metamorphosis.

“Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, she became a butterfly.”

– Barbara Haines Howett
References


