

[Role Reboot](#) [Role Reboot | Life, Off Script](#)

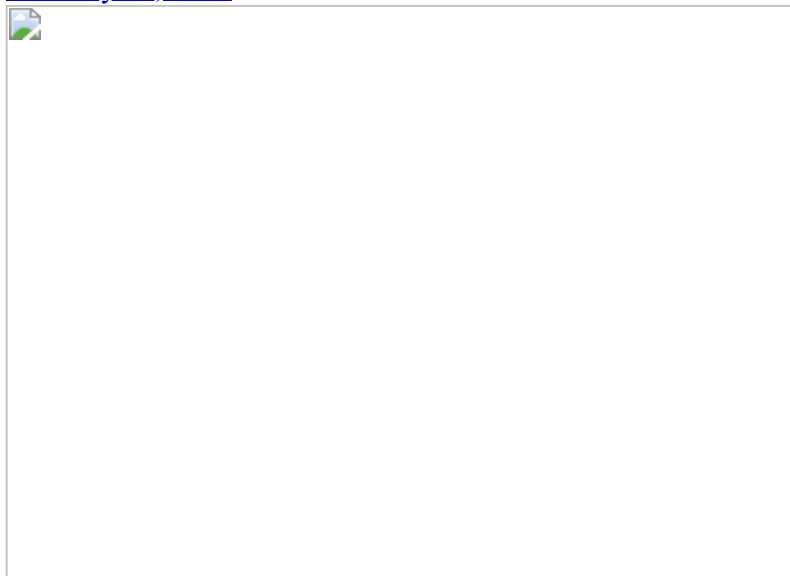
- [Sex + Relationships](#)
- [Family](#)
- [Culture + Politics](#)

[Life](#) [About](#)

1. [About Role Reboot](#)
2. [Who We Are](#)
3. [Why Now?](#)
4. [Submit Your Work](#)
5. [Founders' Story](#)
6. [Real Roles](#)
7. [Turn the Page](#)

What Does It Mean To Be An Adult Today?

By [Annamarya Scaccia](#)
[February 18, 2013](#)



Milestones like getting married and having kids used to clearly mark someone's transition to adulthood, but not anymore.

Conventionally, the “transition to adulthood” is [defined by five milestones](#): “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child.”

It's a reflexive classification that once had a firm stronghold on how we moved through life. According to *The New York Times*, [77 percent of women and 65 percent of men](#) reached all five milestones by the time they turned 30 years old in 1960, compared to less than half of women and one third of men in 2000. And in the early '70s, 21 was the average age of first marriage for women, and 23 for men, but in 2009, it rose five years to 26 and 28 for both women and men, respectively. As for children, the [percentage of births](#) to women ages 20 and younger, and ages 20 to 34, saw a decrease between 1990 and 2008, while birth rates for women 35 and up saw an increase during that same time, from 9 percent to 14 percent. Oh, and more adults ages 18 to 29 [are moving back home with their parents](#) after trying to live on their own.

This shift from getting-everything-done-before-the-age-of-30 to lets-wait-it-out-'cause-why-rush-it spawned a new era of life dubbed “emerging adulthood,” [a theory first proposed by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett](#) in 2000. “Emerging adulthood” classifies that time between 18 and the late 20s, when young adults are—in lay times—self-absorbed,

insecure, wide-eyed and bushy-tailed, and searching for a sense of identity, whether they're from a privileged background or an underserved one.

Some researchers claim it's because Millennials have a "[sense of entitlement](#)"—that they want all the success without putting in the hard work. Others, like Arnett, say it has a lot to do with changing cultural tides and acceptance of once-ostracized engagements like premarital sex, romantic cohabitation, and more freedoms surrounding reproductive choice. Either way, it's a period of ambiguity and exploration bridging the gap between adolescence and *actual* adulthood.

And, Arnett claims, it has an age limit. It's apparently 30—the age I just turned in late January.

The more I read about "emerging adulthood," the more I want to shoot myself in the foot.

I've always considered myself an adult—like a really real adult. I had reached three of the five milestones by the age of 25: financial independence, leaving home, and finishing school. Granted, my execution of those milestones was not exactly flawless, but I pay my bills, I pay my rent, I have a handle on my finances, I am employed, and I am following my career. Those are the aspects that mean the most to me in my definition of an adult.

As for marriage and kids, I've never really measured those as milestones of adulthood. Those aspects, which my boyfriend of eight years and I are seriously talking about, are just life-changing experiences that I choose to want to follow. After all, so many adults my age and beyond choose not to have kids and choose not to get married. It doesn't make them any less of an adult.

So I never thought I was "emerging." I just thought I was taking a different life path, one that started later than most of my peers. I thought we all are taking different life paths.

Just considering the possibility that I haven't reached full adulthood, especially now that I've turned Arnett's cut-off age, has turned my world upside down. I may not actively live by society's constructs but I am still swayed by them. I still sometimes consider myself a failure because I haven't written a crap load of articles for a large media outlet, or because I am working two part-time jobs and freelancing instead of logging 40 hours at one place. Even though I am quick to tell others that there is no set route in life, that it's never too late to start a career or a family, I can't seem to really apply that to myself. But that's never stopped me from referring to myself as an adult.

Then I think about the "adult" stuff I don't have in my life. I don't have my full-time dream job or true income security. I don't have health insurance. I don't have a driver's license. I am no longer putting money into my 401(k). And even though my boyfriend and I make enough combined to live somewhat comfortably, we're not economically stable in that we don't have a well-padded savings account. So can I really say that I'm an adult?

You know what? Absolutely.

Despite all the things I've wanted to accomplish but haven't before I turned 30, I know that I am an adult. I'm not "emerging." I'm not still discovering myself or relying on others to get me by. I'm not living in a black and white world that's strewn with idealistic philosophies. I have a strong sense of identity and a strong sense of morals. I have time to reach my goals—goals that aren't characterizations of maturity but, rather, personal choices.

And that's how society should regard adulthood—as a person's own definition, not a crossed-out list of antiquated milestones. Whether we live on our own or have to live with our parents until we're back on our feet, we are still adults. Whether we have kids or choose to be child-free, we are still adults. Whether we are freelancing or working 9 to 5, we are still adults.

We are not emerging. We are constantly developing into the people we've set out to be. After all, would you dare tell a 55-year-old who's a caretaker to his parents and is going back to school to finally realize his dream that he's not a "real" adult? Probably not.

So why would you say that to a 25-, 27-, or 30-year-old?

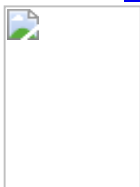
Annamarya Scaccia is an award-winning freelance journalist and graphic designer who's written extensively on sexual violence, reproductive health & rights, marriage equality, constitutional issues, body image, and gender roles,

among other rousing topics. Her work has appeared in/on Philadelphia Weekly, Philadelphia City Paper, Prince George's Suite Magazine, RHRealityCheck.org, TheDailyFemme.com, BLURT, and Origivation. Follow her on Twitter @sitswithpasta.

Related Links:

- [Let's Give Engagement Rings New Meaning](#)
- [The Friday Five](#)
- [Do We Have The Courage To Raise Our Sons More Like Our Daughters?](#)

Posted in [Life](#) and [Class](#), [Manhood](#), [Womanhood](#)



- [Sex + Relationships](#)
- [Family](#)
- [Culture + Politics](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Search Archives](#)

2