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Exploring the Experiences of Emerging Adulthood Among Rural Appalachian Students

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Exploring the Experiences of Emerging Adulthood Among Rural Appalachian Students

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INTRODUCTION

- Emerging adulthood (EA) is a developmental stage that recontextualizes the lives of individuals aged 18-29 years old in modern times (Arnett, 2000).
- Early research has found that emerging adults describe their lives in similar ways (Arnett, 2006), commonly reporting the five themes of:
 - 1) Identity Exploration
 - 2) Feeling In-between
 - 3) Instability
 - 4) Being Self-Focused
 - 5) Exploring Possibilities
- Studies have previously examined these themes within the context of racial and ethnic cultural differences (Baggio et al., 2017; Arnett et al., 2020), but none have considered how community setting (e.g., rurality) impacts emerging adults' experiences.

METHODS

Participants (n = 296; M age = 20.13 years) completed an online survey, including two open-ended questions about transitioning to adulthood. Responses were coded based on their applicability to the five themes of emerging adulthood.

1. What have you most enjoyed about becoming an adult? (+)
2. What is most stressful about becoming an adult? (-)

Table 1. Example responses coded as being self-focused

+	"Having a stronger voice for myself rather than being in the background of my parents".
+	"Having my own independence from my family and being able to do what I want without having to seek permission. "
-	"(Now that) I am an adult, I need to be independent and not ask for help so I try doing everything on my own"

Data Analysis

Chi-square tests examined demographic differences in response themes. Post-hoc analyses were conducted on significant values, using a Bonferroni-corrected alpha ($p = .008$).

Rural students report being self-focused as a positive aspect of emerging adulthood more frequently than expected.



Developmental Psychopathology Lab

RESULTS

Chi square analyses examined the presence of emerging adult themes in relation to community setting (rural, urban, suburban).

- Positive endorsement of *being self-focused* differed by the area in which one grew up, $X^2(2, 277) = 13.34, p = .001$.
- Individuals from rural areas reported *being self-focused* as a positive feature of adulthood, more so than expected ($p = .002$)

Figure 1. Sample categorized by community setting, by percentage

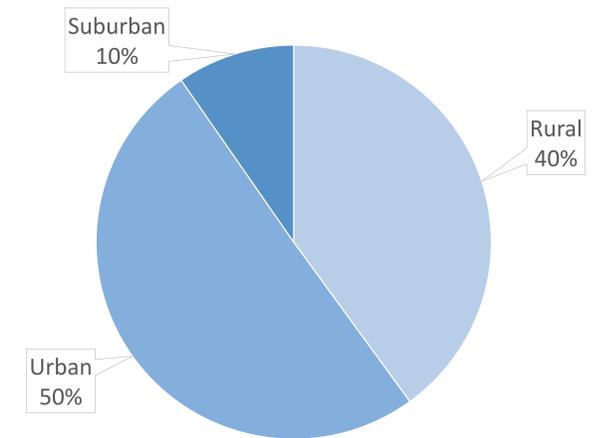


Table 2. Crosstabs for positive endorsement of being self-focused in emerging adulthood

	Rural	Urban	Suburban
Did Not Endorse	92	88	16
Endorsed	19	51	27
Total	111	139	27

DISCUSSION

- Strong family commitments often associated with rural culture (Hand & Payne, 2008) may cause rural emerging adults to perceive the ability to focus on their own priorities and goals, rather than that of their family members, as the most salient benefit of growing older.
- Future research surrounding Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood may require further consideration of smaller-scale cultural influences such as rurality.