

*Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*  
(Oxford University Press, 2011)

By Christian Smith with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson and  
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Life for emerging adults is vastly different today than it was for their counterparts even a generation ago. Young people are waiting longer to marry, to have children, and to choose a career direction. As a result, they enjoy more freedom, opportunities, and personal growth than ever before. But the transition to adulthood is also more complex, disjointed, and confusing.

In *Lost in Transition*, Christian Smith and his collaborators draw on 230 in-depth interviews with a broad cross-section of emerging adults (ages 18-23) to investigate the difficulties young people face today, the underlying causes of those difficulties, and the consequences both for individuals and for American society as a whole. Rampant consumer capitalism, ongoing failures in education, hyper-individualism, postmodernist moral relativism, and other aspects of American culture are all contributing to the chaotic terrain that emerging adults must cross.

Smith identifies five major problems facing very many young people today: confused moral reasoning, routine intoxication, materialistic life goals, regrettable sexual experiences, and disengagement from civic and political life. The trouble does not lie only with the emerging adults or their poor individual decisions but has much deeper roots in mainstream American culture--a culture which emerging adults have largely inherited rather than created. Older adults, Smith argues, must recognize that much of the responsibility for the pain and confusion young people face lies with them.

Rejecting both sky-is-falling alarmism on the one hand and complacent disregard on the other, Smith suggests the need for what he calls "realistic concern"--and a reconsideration of our cultural priorities and practices--that will help emerging adults more skillfully engage the unique challenges they face.

Even-handed, engagingly written, and based on comprehensive research, *Lost in Transition* brings much needed attention to the darker side of the transition to adulthood.

## Features

Based on the most accurate nationally-representative data, very strong research methodology and good cross-sectional data of 18-23 year olds

A comprehensive look at problems and troubles in emerging adulthood

Provides a balance of liberal and conservative perspectives on emerging adulthood

## Reviews

"*Lost in Transition* is a groundbreaking, compelling, and deeply necessary look at the challenges facing young people today. Not content to believe tired clichés about the enthusiasm of youth, Christian Smith and colleagues conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of today's emerging adults. The results, based on both quantitative analysis and detailed qualitative interviews, are shocking, revealing widespread moral relativism and precious little civic engagement. *Lost in Transition* takes a fair, clear-eyed look at this group, unafraid to reveal the serious problems facing young adults. We ignore these challenges at our peril. *Lost in Transition* is a must-read for parents and educators interested in understanding today's generation. A courageous, nuanced, deep-dive look at today's youth."---Jean Twenge, author of *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before*

"A balanced and thoroughly-researched examination of the dark side of emerging adulthood. *Lost in Transition* is public sociology at its finest, and deserves careful reading by anyone who seeks to understand emerging adults in America."---Tim Clydesdale, author of *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens after High School*

"Emerging adulthood is not always a period of 'glory days,' when young people savor the freedom and fun of their youth. With this book, Smith and his colleagues illuminate the darker side of the years from the late teens through the early twenties. Through their adept use of rich, in-depth interviews with 18-23-year-olds, they show the many ways emerging adults struggle to find a meaningful place in the world. Crucially, their insights provide a convincing argument that the difficulties of emerging adults arise not from any inherent features of the age period, and still less from any moral failures on their part, but from the what their society provides null and fails to provide null as resources of meaning for them in their journey to adulthood. This book is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand young Americans and help them thrive."--Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, author of *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*