Emerging and Young Adulthood
Advancing Responsible Adolescent Development

Series Editor:
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EMERGING AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD
Multiple Perspectives, Diverse Narratives
by Varda Konstam

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Multiple Perspectives, Diverse Narratives

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Springer
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To Marvin, Amanda and Jeremy
— my inspirations
Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Amali De Zoysa for providing invaluable support, persistence and steadfastness throughout the process of writing this book. I would also like to thank Phyllis Laffer for her continued support.
Prologue

Having two children, one in the thick of navigating emerging adulthood, the other about to enter it, I found myself struggling between being understanding in terms of how difficult it is to negotiate a seemingly more complex and uncertain environment, and expecting that my children pick up the pace and live their lives using developmental markers that I had internalized. I viewed myself as overly indulgent and involved in the lives of my children. How could I be helpful in my role as parent, friend, and confidante?

It was easy to be judgmental. I was married at 21, had a career that exceeded my expectations by age 27, and my first child at the age of 29. I listened to my internal voice saying, “You don’t really get what it’s like out there, these are different times that require different approaches, different ways of being and coping.” I decided to use my analytic and clinical skills, instead of my well-honed judgmental skills, and convinced myself to be more open to alternative perspectives and ways of thinking about this developmental period. I was going to grapple with the issues, and communicate my newfound understanding to students and potential practitioners in the field, as well as the major stakeholders, individuals negotiating and/or interfacing with emerging and young adults, parents, and employers. I was determined to use my energies constructively and embark on writing a book that was grounded in the academic literature, provided clarity and reassurance whenever possible, but at the same time did not present an overly optimistic picture that was reassuring for reassurance sake.

What happens to emerging adults as they “emerge” from their 20s? How can we integrate their diverse narratives and perspectives and go beyond what we already know about them? My instincts and clinical skills told me they were not a monolithic group, and that the meanings they attached to this developmental period were diverse and textured, informed in part by the experiences they encountered in their 20s. In the process, I would try to decipher and understand what skill-sets, personal characteristics, and environmental contexts enable emerging and young adults to thrive in a highly challenging work and interpersonal environment.
The diverse voices of the major stakeholders are represented: emerging and young adults, parents, and employers. The Chinese ideograph indicating crisis suggests danger as well as opportunity. Listening to the various stakeholders will provide a unique opportunity to view this developmental juncture from multiple perspectives and in the process expand the existing literature.
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