

Transition into Adulthood

High School Graduation

Throughout the United States, high school graduation is marked by ceremony and celebration. Typical graduates are aged seventeen to nineteen years.

Now, let's look at some statistics on high school graduation. According to the report "High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States," the average high school graduation rate for students in 2006 who went all the way from freshman through senior was 73 percent.

The report also indicated that 3.3 million people in the United States aged sixteen to twenty-four years were not enrolled in high school or had not earned a high school degree or an equivalent.

Finally, the report indicated that children in low-income families were ten times more likely to drop out of high school as compared to children belonging to higher-income families.

Now, let's look at high school graduation from an ethnicity perspective. In 2004, the highest proportions of people with high school diplomas were non-Hispanic whites (90 percent), Asian Americans (86.8 percent), African Americans (80.6 percent), and Hispanic Americans (58.4 percent).

Does graduating high school indicate that a person is an adult?

Yes

An analysis of the statistical data indicates that although high school graduation is perceived as a common event that may indicate the transition into adulthood, the **variability** in the high school **graduation rates** and **disparities based on race and ethnicity** indicate that it may not be as good an indicator as perceived.

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Marriage

According to the 2004 U.S. Census Bureau, in 2003, the median of a person's first marriage was twenty-seven years for men and twenty-five years for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). As you can see, since the year 1900, the mean age for men has increased by less than two years and, for women by less than four years.

The difference in the change in the marriage age for men and women can be related to the change in the social norms for women in the twentieth century. For instance, more women have started attending college and entering the job market. Moreover, not all people get married; and sometimes they marry at a much later age. Some people also decide to live together, or cohabit.

From an ethnicity perspective, over 70 percent of women and men between the ages of twenty five and forty-four years are married; 84 percent are non-Hispanic white women, while only 56 percent are non-Hispanic black women.

Does getting married indicate that a person is an adult?

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The common hallmarks denoting the transition into adulthood and the variability presented diminish their credibility in identifying someone as an adult. The transition into adulthood could depend on how individuals define themselves as adults. Rankin and Kenyon (2008) examined how adults define themselves based on established cultural norms and traditions. Their results indicated that individuals from culturally traditional backgrounds laid more emphasis on role transition markers (events) such as religious sacraments, graduation, and marriage.

The transition into adulthood is used to explain some of the challenges when describing adult development. Although there are common factors in adult development, such as marriage, there is also variability, especially when examining adult development. Throughout this course, it will be important to understand that even though we are examining some common characteristics of adult development, those common, or even shared characteristics, do not encompass the variability that defines adult development.